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THE ROLE OF LAW IN ARTHUR MILLER'S DRAMA

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA





UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled The Role of Law in Arthur Miller's Drama, submitted by Elizabeth Teresa Barrett in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



## ABSTRACT

I have chosen to approach this study of Arthur Miller from the point of view of law because a consciousness of the human need for order and coherence informs all his theoretical and dramatic writing; because he alone among contemporary dramatists seems still to believe that modern man can order and assimilate his universe: because his central interests, man in society, man's psychology, and the function of art, each involve species of law and admit of analysis most easily under that heading; and because his own concept of the function of law in relation to human life alters noticeably in the course of his career.

Chapter I investigates Miller's theoretical canon and concludes from it that his thematic interests are threefold: man's relationship to his society, man's search for self-justification, and man's fascination with art. Chapter II examines the first of these in greater depth through the plays and establishes that two kinds of law, positive (comprising legislative and conventional) and natural (a Utopian, moral ideal) regulate the individual's position in society; the former dictates what is to be and the latter indicates what ought to be. It is noted that the passionate (and

## CHAPTER 1

The first chapter of the book is devoted to the study of the

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therefore dramatic) individual progresses through positive law toward natural law, driven by a psychological instinct or law. Chapter III focuses on the progression and considers the aspects of its psychological motivation. The function and significance of the name, tragedy, "tragic vision," the demonic, innocence, guilt and responsibility are explored through the plays, and the exploration of these illuminates the alteration that Miller's concept of law undergoes. The alteration is viewed as a philosophical, thematic development. Chapter IV briefly explores the relationship between this philosophical development and Miller's dramatic form. These are considered in relation to contemporary literature, and particularly contemporary drama. Some attempt is made to account for Miller's adoption of his literary and philosophical position, and to delineate its limitations and its power.





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## CHAPTER I

### THEORY: THE MAJOR CONCERNS

Certain explicit interests may be traced throughout Miller's theoretical work; it is perhaps best to state these first and then to examine them in detail. He is concerned to isolate the human will from the forces which may usurp it, and to assert the individual's capacity to dominate his social predicament. His is never "victim" literature. He demands that drama ask the ultimately relevant human question, "how to live?". He seeks the answer to this not in solipsistic or individual terms, but in universalized social terms: how is man to come to viable terms with his society without forfeiting his individual consciousness? He believes in the power of drama to focus and articulate the common anxieties of men, and so to bring them closer together. This conviction presupposes an ethical view of human life, and to Miller the artist is in fact the arbiter of ethics insofar as he does articulate the daily chaos into a symbolically unified order. To him, the artist is the creator of society, because he articulates a ritual in which other men may participate and so find meaning. When the artistic momentum falters--when the rhythm of





of participation is broken--men become self-conscious as isolated integers rather than as members of a unity, and are dangerously susceptible to neurosis.

The idea of what they are and of what their society is unifies men; hence Miller cherishes a drama of idea rather than mood, which is not to suggest that he places ideas above action. Rather, he wishes to concern himself with moral and philosophical considerations that arise out of action (opposed, presumably, to the stalemated frustration that ends a mood play). He deliberately treads a thin line between "intellectual" and "popular" thought in an effort to create a drama that will, without forfeiting the ideals of fine art, be relevant to "the common man,"<sup>1</sup> and will enable him to find through drama a greater understanding of his own life.

Appropriately, in view of this goal, Miller attributes the motivation for his creativity to curiosity and to what Camus has called "The wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart."<sup>2</sup> Like Camus, Miller finds that only by creating can one "give a shape to one's fate."<sup>3</sup> But Miller seems to have come to these conclusions through a rather less formal quest than Camus'. In the "Introduction" to his Collected Plays he observes that "The assumption--or presumption--behind these plays is that life has meaning."<sup>4</sup> The ques-



tion of the ultimate absurdity of life rarely enters Miller's work, and I think its absence is an indication of his sanity. The question of ultimate authority in the form of a god is similarly absent, perhaps because neither hypothesis--no meaning or preordained meaning--will get a man very far along in the uncomfortable business of living; beyond each the quest for meaning now must still be followed in the psychological responses of the human organism. Schooled in the social chaos of the depression, Miller learned what this more regimented generation may forget: that the meaning a life can achieve must evolve from its orderly expression, and, further, that the expression must evolve as it is worked at--it cannot ever be whole. In the opening pages of the "Introduction" to the Collected Plays he speaks of an effort "to write so that one's changing vision of people in the world is more accurately represented in each succeeding work."<sup>5</sup> The vision changes, it is but one man's response to "what is in the air," his effort to extract from these ephemeral impressions a message about their true meaning and value.

In "The Shadows of the Gods" Miller refers to what The Brothers Karamazov "said" to him:

There is a hidden order in the world. There is only one reason to live. It is to discover its nature. The good are those who do this. The evil say that there is nothing beyond the face of the world, the





surface reality. Man will only find peace when he learns to live humanly, in conformity to those laws which decree his human nature.<sup>6</sup>

Dostoevsky's "order" is on a mystical religious level; Miller's tends to hover closer to practical psychology, but each recognizes the imperative validity of the artistic symbol to explain, inspire, and relate men, and Miller's observations on writing apply to both:

One had the right to write because other people needed news of the inner world, and if they went too long without such news they would go mad with the chaos of their lives. . . . As time went on, a lot of time, it became clear to me that I was not only reporting to others but to myself first and foremost. I wrote not only to find a way into the world but to hold it away from me so that sheer, senseless events would not devour me.<sup>7</sup>

In the same passage Miller refers to chaos as "life lived oblivious of history." In a later comment he observes that Chekhov's plays are great "not because they do not give answers but because they strive so mightily to discover them, and in the process draw into view a world that is historical."<sup>8</sup> The role of drama, then, is to articulate relevant human questions in contemporary terms, and still to suggest that they are eternal questions only arbitrarily solvable. Miller attempts in his drama to probe human situations on a variety of cultural levels and to find in them something which "will heighten his [the playgoer's] awareness of what living in our time involves";<sup>9</sup> for in Miller's moral, humanistic view, "meaning is the





ultimate reward for having lived."<sup>10</sup> The ideals are Greek; to achieve them, he seeks a fusion of social and tragic perspectives.

In his essay "On Social Plays" Miller differentiates between Greek and American concepts of society. The Greeks, he says, conceived of man and society as an organic unity, and

The tragic victory consisted in demonstrating that the polis--the whole people--had discovered some aspect of the Grand Design which was also the right way to live together.<sup>11</sup>

Society in modern America is less personal; instead of connoting a web of cooperating individuals it connotes a jungle of conflicting interests, vaguely defined but stifling and hostile to the individual.

In the drama and in literature men seem to seek a way to live alone -- to yield less of their will to the social organ that envelops them. The arbitrary answers to man's questioning which sufficed Greek society are inadequate to our egocentric society. This situation has resulted in a more empirical approach to life and much scientific advance; but science, even psychological science, fails to provide a needed cohesion, harmony, and purpose. Miller observes that

nowhere in the world where industrialized economy rules--where specialization in work, politics, and social life is the norm--nowhere has man discovered a means of connecting himself to society except in the form of a truce with it. The best we have been able to do is to speak of a "duty" to society, and this implies sacrifice or self-deprivation. To think of an individual fulfilling his subjective needs through social action, to think of him living most completely when





he lives most socially, to think of him as doing this, not as a social worker acting out of conscientious motives, but naturally, without guilt or sense of oddness--this is difficult for us to imagine, and when we can, we know at the same time that only a few, perhaps a blessed few, are so constructed as to manage it.<sup>12</sup>

Freud makes much the same observation in Civilization and Its Discontents. According to him the individual comes to obey the social code from fear of loss of security, and develops neurotic guilts about his inner discomfiture with the code he follows. This condition, on a wider scale, is what Freud calls the "malaise" of civilization. Like him, Miller recognizes that the condition turns men inward to familial and sexual preoccupations. This, however, is the closed road of the neurotic, leading in American drama to the "frustration-blues" of Williams, the emasculated domesticity of Inge, or the hysterical savagery of Albee. The style is prose realism, the themes are frustration, personal disintegration, and violence, the effect is despair; these dramatists catch the ethos of their culture masterfully, but they do not aim for or achieve Miller's goal: they do not help men to live. Miller, rightly, I think, prophesies in "On Social Plays" that prose realism of this kitchen-to-bedroom variety will die out, because

we are bored with it; we demand something more, something "higher," on the stage, while at the same time we refuse, or do not know how,





to live our private lives excepting as ego-centers. I believe it is this paradox that underlies the kind of struggle taking place in the drama today--a struggle at one and the same time to write of private persons privately and yet lift up their means of expression to a poetic--that is, a social--level.<sup>13</sup>

This "struggle" is necessary because only the social drama deals with the whole man, and

seeks to deal with his differences from others not per se, but toward the end that, if only through drama, we may know how much the same we are, for if we lose that knowledge we shall have nothing left at all.<sup>14</sup>

Such "knowledge" is difficult to achieve because we cannot now respect the representative capacity of the individual man. We have no contemporary spokesmen who can replace the nobility of previous centuries, and our plight is complicated by the fact that, in any case, the fate of modern man involves his psyche more than it does his social rank. A veneer of psychological knowledge has immuned us to the heroic:

Our society--and I am speaking of every industrialized society in the world--is so complex, each person being so specialized an integer, that the moment any individual is dramatically characterized and set forth as a hero, our common sense reduces him to the size of a complainer, a misfit. . . we no longer believe that some ultimate sense can in fact be made of social causation, or in the possibility that any individual can, by a heroic effort, make sense of it. Thus the man that is driven to question the moral chaos in which we live ends up in our estimate as a possibly commendable but definitely odd fellow, and probably as a compulsively driven neurotic.<sup>15</sup>



The modern "hero" is a victim before he begins. This implies an immense "selling out" on the part of art to the pressure of popular opinion--to the credo of the culture that finds in a stance of pseudo-despair a license for irresponsibility and lethargy. In "The State of the Theatre" Miller summarizes the problem as it appears in American drama:

our main tradition from O'Neill to the present, revolves around the question of integrity--not moral integrity alone, but the integrity of the personality. The difficulty is to locate the forces of disintegration. I have to believe they exist and can be unveiled.<sup>16</sup>

To "have to believe" something suggests a skepticism that has weighed alternatives. Freud suspended judgement on the validity of civilization; Miller, artist rather than scientist, cannot afford to. His ethics tell him that the onus for sustaining civilization is on him and his kind; the alternative to the Dionysiac miasma forecast in An American Dream is thought, self-control, and a revival of the concept and meaning of tragedy. For as Miller has noted, "we first require human sacrifice before our guilt can be transformed into responsibility."<sup>17</sup> The tragic hero is in this sense a symbolic sacrifice, and his decline threatens the stability of our civilization. Pathos and despair follow in his wake, aggravated by the helplessness a cybernetic civilization implies. These come,





Miller says, because

what has been lost in this world, what is rapidly fading from consciousness, is the uniqueness of the individual. In my opinion, the mission of literature is to reassert this, to reproduce it in every generation, to persist against all odds in justifying a human-centered vision of life.<sup>18</sup>

This has always been Miller's chief concern. Seventeen years before writing the passage above, he attempted to reformulate the principles of tragedy in contemporary terms, in "Tragedy and the Common Man."

Pathos, he maintains in this essay, "is achieved when the protagonist is, by virtue of his witlessness, his insensitivity, or the very air he gives off, incapable of grappling with a much superior force."<sup>19</sup> It is "the mode for the pessimist," in that it always implies defeat. Tragedy contains the possibility of victory. The "superior force" men are stirred to grapple with today is the society that moulds them against their will; because it draws support from scientific logic this society is more formidable than the gods with whom OEdipus reckoned. It is, like the gods, the final arbiter of the rules and values of human life--that is, for all but the strongest. Its power depends on its ability to cajole or coerce men into relinquishing their individual will, and hence, their dignity. Miller says that





the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing--his sense of personal dignity.<sup>20</sup>

The tragic feeling thus rises out of a direct confrontation between life and death which invokes an intuition of their profoundest meaning. Life, lived without an independent will (or the illusion of one) is no life at all:

the fateful wound from which the inevitable events spiral is the wound of indignity, and its dominant force is indignation. Tragedy, then, is a consequence of man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly.<sup>21</sup>

and

The flaw, or crack in the character, is really nothing--and need be nothing--but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status.<sup>22</sup>

Tragedy originates in an individual but expands to question the relevance of the race and its actions:

from this total onslaught by an individual against the seemingly stable cosmos surrounding us--from this total examination of the "unchangeable" environment--comes the terror and the fear that is classically associated with tragedy.

More important, from this total questioning of what has previously been unquestioned, we learn.<sup>23</sup>

A cliché current in American thought now is that one must learn to accept everything. Its motive is creditable--to expand the human mind beyond its prejudices--but its phrasing suggests a treacherous



passivity. It exalts the scientist over the humanist, who would be more likely to make the challenge in Miller's terms:

No tragedy can therefore come about when its author fears to question absolutely everything, when he regards any institution, habit or custom as being either everlasting, immutable, or inevitable. . . .for a moment, everything is in suspension, nothing is accepted, and in this stretching and tearing apart of the cosmos, in the very action of the so doing, the character gains "size". . . . The commonest of men may take on that stature to the extent of his willingness to throw all he has into the contest, the battle to secure his rightful place in his world.<sup>24</sup>

Questioning instead of accepting, exercising one's will rather than submitting to a flow of events--in these self-definitive gestures

Miller finds the ultimate human relevance:

It is not enough any more to know that one is at the mercy of social pressures; it is necessary to understand that such a sealed fate cannot be accepted.<sup>25</sup>

There is an element of socialist's zeal in Miller's contention that tragic questioning which can engage the relevancy of the race is within the range of the common man. Critics usually point out that the common man (using Willy Loman as chief example) has not the intelligence or perspective to pose questions of tragic import. This argument may be countered in two ways. First, Miller's ideal is Greek: he seeks a society where men are united in a common understanding of what life is and what its tragic limits are. In the contemporary American society he writes about men do not share







these concepts. The "small" man is bound by economic determinants, the "big" man by social ones, the professional by, perhaps, intellectual ones. Each area of voluntary or involuntary specialization requires a differing scale of values. Hence within the rigid framework imposed on him by his society, a character like Willy Loman is indeed tragic, because he dares to question the framework's validity and dares to give his life for a personally meaningful answer. Secondly, the only kind of drama that can today represent the tragic nature of life to all men, and so unite them in a common understanding, is this parochial drama. Ideally, it opens up another world to the part of the audience not familiar with its determinants, and prompts sodality between these and the part of the audience which shares its determinants.

Miller's position regarding "tragedy and the common man" is difficult and complex, but it is not untenable. It is well, I think, to bear in mind the variety of his tragic heroes when evaluating his theory; he has created both Willy Loman and Quentin, Eddie Carbone and Leduc. He does not suggest that the common man may have the acumen or stature of his intellectual and social superiors; he simply maintains that in his own world the common man may achieve tragic heights, and these may, as tragedy always does,



disturb, instruct, and inspire his peers. Spectators who view his tragedy from a perspective of wider consciousness may judge it trivial in ultimate terms (assuming that they are the arbiters of the "ultimate"), but in his own terms it is the zenith of reality-- and indeed, when it comes to the point of decision, the "ultimate terms" are human: Lear and his Fool are both tragic, and who is to say which suffers most? Miller once observed that for him the dramatic challenge is still "the Elizabethan one, the public address on the street corner."<sup>26</sup> It is, then, a challenge to draw all the diversity of human life, with its many levels of consciousness and modes of enduring, into the dramatic lens, and to focus its human essence on the stage. It remains to be seen whether or not the challenge is too great for this age.

The function of drama is to make men less alone, the function of tragedy is to renew men's faith in the transcendent power and nobility of the individual. But, as I have already mentioned, the tragic hero is in part a sacrificial figure, and "we first require human sacrifices before our guilt can be transformed into responsibility."<sup>27</sup> Recently Miller has evinced special interest in the psychological implications of the tragic-heroic sacrifice, guilt, and responsibility. He suggests that the sacrifice occurs because his situa-





tion demands of the hero "a price too great for him to pay--the authenticity of his own self-image and his pride."<sup>28</sup> This attitude is linked to guilt: the hero could not endure the guilt that compromising his self-image and pride would involve. A single psychological step further lies responsibility: the hero owes it to himself and, ultimately, to the race to be true to his self-image and pride, for only with this individual strength can man endure and grow. All men will not sacrifice themselves for their guilt, or their dignity, but some must to ensure that the rest do not compromise themselves completely out of their independence. Miller places the responsibility for survival squarely on the integrity of the human will:

we do not have many wills, but only one; it cannot be continuously compromised without atrophy setting in altogether.<sup>29</sup>

In order for the will not to be compromised an ever increasing courage and self-knowledge is necessary. Drama, by presenting an example of a courageous man who is compelled to evaluate himself justly even at the cost of his life, gives its audience insights into their own selves and thus transforms the guilt they feel for the hero's sacrifice into renewed awareness and responsibility for themselves. They may not, perhaps, equal his stature, but





they feel the need to reach toward it, and in the reaching, they grow.

For Miller, living in our time involves a constant effort to affirm the representative validity of individual experience, the dignity and integrity of the human will, and the elusive poetic intuition that "we are made, and yet are more than what made us."<sup>30</sup> These are best done, he maintains, through art, for the very concept of a unitary mankind, its inner laws and definition, has been held together in the mind of man and in the conscience of man through the symbols which artists have given the world.<sup>31</sup>

Miller's chief theoretical concerns seem to be threefold: man's relationship to his society, man's relationship to himself, and man's relationship to art. Keeping his theory in mind, I shall now turn to his plays and explore his dramatic interpretation of his interests.



## CHAPTER II

### SOCIETY: LAW AND THE INDIVIDUAL

"In one sense," Miller has observed,

a play is a species of jurisprudence, and some part of it must take the advocate's role, something else must act in defense, and the entirety must engage the Law.<sup>1</sup>

In his plays the advocate's role is taken by the social norms governing each situation; the defense is represented by a protagonist who opposes these norms; and the Law which these engage is larger than either of them, suggesting an ultimate order only accessible to man through the insights his temporal litigations may excite. In some of the plays this Law speaks through an exceptionally conscious character.

Miller has also noted that

all plays we call great. . . are ultimately involved with some aspect of a single problem. . . : How may a man make of the outside world a home? How and in what ways must he strive to change and overcome within himself and outside himself if he is to find the safety, the surroundings of love, the ease of soul, the sense of identity and honor which, evidently, all men have connected in their memories with the idea of family?<sup>2</sup>

A less optimistic dramatist might ask if man can ever achieve this return to infant security, but Miller, accepting the ceaseless dialectic





between individual and society as proof of man's effort to do so, accepts also the possibility of success.

One of the ways in which a man may "make of the outside world a home" is by discovering the laws which govern the "outside world" and conducting himself in accordance with them. These laws, however, are products of earlier generations; they are human, not divine, in origin. Hence they are subject to constant revision, and it becomes the responsibility of each individual to assess and oppose them as well as to obey them. To this extent the fate of the race rests on each member of it. A large portion of mankind is incapable of the kind of rational evaluation necessary to preserve the vitality of human law; to this portion is left the sometimes tragic role of reacting, in response to an intuitive conviction that things are not as they should be. Thus a man's effort to "make of the outside world a home" is in part an objective effort at comprehension of and cooperation with it, in part conscious opposition to it, and in part a subjective reconstructing of it in terms of his personal vision. To the extent that he is conscious and in control of his relationship to his environment, he ceases to be tragic. The three possible relationships I have outlined correspond to three dif-



ferent kinds of law: the first, comprehension and cooperation, corresponds to positive law, the accepted laws of a land. In Miller's terms, these would sustain the advocate's role. The second, conscious opposition, corresponds to natural law or what Miller calls "the Law." The third, subjective reconstructing, corresponds to psychological law or to Miller's defense, providing that the defense is not pre-eminently conscious. In this chapter I shall examine the part positive and natural law take in the plays; in Chapter III I shall examine the part that psychological law takes.

Positive law is, as I have said, of human origin. It is open to alteration through judiciary or evolutionary processes, but is by social convention absolute and inviolate while it stands. I shall here take it to encompass social, moral, and economic conventions as well as legal statutes, since these play an equally large role in shaping the individual. Wherever these laws appear, they draw the respect of absolutes in a shifting world. Their violation is always the stroke that focuses attention on a complex of individuals in society and calls into question both the value of the laws and the alternate standards of their violator.





Natural law is a Utopian ideal, and so can never be completely realized in human society. It involves a synthesis of reason, feeling, and conscience, from which positive law originates. Its source is psychological in that it springs from man's need for order and control, but it considers more of the factors which qualify the human situation than positive law, with its arbitrary formulae, is able to. Consequently, it opposes positive law. The human representative of natural law is the "conscious" man, the man always in the van of social change. His is the kind of consciousness that can drive a situation into tragedy, and, bypassing positive law, momentarily lay bare those psychological laws on which a man has built himself. (It seems to me that natural law should emerge in the course of a dramatic conflict between positive and psychological law, if it is to emerge at all, but Miller tends to center it in a single, Herculean character. This is a direct result of his own moral consciousness, and I shall discuss it as such in more detail in Chapter IV.) Natural and positive law intersect insofar as the former is the hypothetical ideal of the latter: the goal it would reach if it could encompass all possible psychological complexities without destroying itself. Positive law, the law which governs society, is modified in response to



and in proportion to the will of the individual to oppose it, and the nature of its modification is temperate or catastrophic depending on the consciousness of this individual. The dramatist's vision, translated into his work, raises the consciousness of the audience through the medium of a fictive world, and so makes possible for them a temperate approach to the real world.

Miller's plays are all grounded in the world of positive law, the common sense world which, while not necessarily denying the wider horizons of natural law, yet makes no attempt to incorporate them. It is a world where individuals fit themselves to their society instead of the reverse; it is the world inhabited by the greater part of mankind.

Joe Keller, in All My Sons, represents the self-made American bourgeois whose standard of values centers on economic and social prestige. Miller describes him in the stage directions:

a businessman these many years, but with the imprint of the machine-shop worker and boss still upon him. When he reads, when he speaks, when he listens, it is with the terrible concentration of the uneducated man for whom there is still wonder in many commonly known things, a man whose judgments must be dredged out of experience and a peasant-like common sense. A man among men. (Collected Plays, 58-9)

The description suggests a man whose moral judgments will be founded on practical self-interest, and whose horizons will stretch





no further than his direct experience. The slow beginning of the play's first act, with Joe's neighbours and family meandering on and off stage, emphasizes the sealed, placid nature of his world. He reposes in a security he has invested all his resources to build. His relationship to positive law is a foreshortened one, family-centered as one might expect of a man who finds the world a bewildering maze. He has the bourgeois ethic: material success, respect in his community, a son to carry on the business--these are the goals he lives for. The idea that Chris might shrug these off for a moral ideal shakes him:

don't think like that. Because what the hell did I work for? That's only for you, Chris, the whole shootin' match is for you!

(Collected Plays, 69)

Because his moral horizon is limited to his family, Joe can rationalize his crime and his betrayal of his friend, Deever:

I'm in business, a man is in business; a hundred and twenty cracked, you're out of business; you got a process, the process don't work you're out of business; you don't know how to operate, your stuff is no good; they close you up, they tear up your contracts, what the hell's it to them? You lay forty years into a business and they knock you out in five minutes, what could I do, let them take forty years, let them take my life away? . . . Chris, I did it for you, it was a chance and I took it for you. (Collected Plays, 115)

Joe sees himself as only one of many war profiteers, and justifies his own immunity and comfort on the dual grounds that "everyone



did it" and "I did it for the family." To Joe, and to others in this drama, the odd character is Chris, who, in Sue Bayliss' words, "makes people want to be better than it's possible to be." The world of All My Sons is ruled by convention and a civilized savagery. In business, it is "the land of the great big dogs" where "you don't love a man. . .you eat him! That's the principle, the only one we live by"; in personal ethics it forces compromise, as in Jim Bayliss' case:

The compromise is always made. In a peculiar way. Frank is right--every man does have a star. The star of one's honesty. And you spend your life groping for it, but once it's out it never lights again. . .now I live in the usual darkness; I can't find myself; it's even hard sometimes to remember the kind of man I wanted to be.

(Collected Plays, 118)

Under such deterministic circumstances the best a man can hope for is a compromise that leaves him some vestige of dignity. Joe believes he has found it by preserving his family name and business from the onslaught of the law and public opinion:

The day I come home, I got out of my car--but not in front of the house. . .on the corner. . . . Everybody knew I was getting out that day; the porches were loaded. Picture it now; none of them believed I was innocent. The story was, I pulled a fast one getting myself exonerated. So I get out of my car, and I walk down the street. But very slow. And with a smile. The beast! I was the beast; the guy who sold cracked cylinder heads to the Army Air Force; the guy who made twenty-one P-40's crash in Australia. Kid, walkin' down the street that day I was guilty as hell. Except I wasn't, and there was a court paper in my pocket to prove I wasn't, and I walked. . .past. . .the porches. Result. Fourteen months







later I had one of the best shops in the state again, a respected man again; bigger than ever. (Collected Plays, 80)

Ironically, though, this respect is chimerical. He is given credit for "being smart"--nothing more. The debilitating cynicism that underlies this is the price a civilization pays for allowing property to be placed over people. The war had in fact destroyed precisely what Chris hoped it would create:

Everything was being destroyed, see, but it seemed to me that one new thing was made. A kind of--responsibility. Man for man. You understand me? --To show that, to bring that onto the earth again like some kind of monument and everyone would feel it standing there, behind him, and it would make a difference to him. And then I came home and it was incredible. I--there was no meaning in it here; the whole thing to them was a kind of a --bus accident. (Collected Plays, 85)

Miller, moralist, stands rather too closely behind this ex-serviceman. Chris represents the natural law that would oppose the shabby, corrupt materialism around him, and he speaks too much about it. Throughout the play he is altogether too pure to be real, or at least to be good for the dramatic effect. He indicates the psychological inadequacy of Miller's early moral stance.

In Death of a Salesman, the world of positive law surrounds Willy Loman and threatens to engulf him. In point of fact, in all the terms that his society recognizes, Willy is a failure. Just as his house, small and old, is being crowded out of existence by the en-



croaching city, he is being crowded out of existence by the economic laws that govern the city. He cannot meet the empirical demands imposed by his world: a faulty refrigerator, a leaking roof, insurance payments, endless bills--each represents a disaster. His is the pathos of the time-payment victim:

Once in my life I would like to own something outright before it's broken! I'm always in a race with the junkyard!

(Collected Plays, 174)

He is a failure as a salesman: he is old, his friends on the road are dead, and

the trouble is, Linda, people don't seem to take to me. . . . They seem to laugh at me. . . . I don't know the reason for it, but they just pass me by. I'm not noticed. . . . I'm fat. I'm very--foolish to look at, Linda. (Collected Plays, 148-9)

He is a failure as a husband; no longer able to support his wife, dependent on Charley's generosity to save a little of his dignity before her, and always haunted by his infidelity with the woman in Boston. He is a failure as a father; one son has grown up a heartless playboy, the other a petty thief, rootless and bifurcated by his feelings for his father. He feels himself to be a failure to his ancestral family, and, most of all, to the brother, Ben, whom he idolizes and whom he can never quite reach. Aggravating these failures daily is Charley, his next door neighbour. Where Willy has failed, Charley has succeeded,





and seemingly without trying as hard. A parallel contrast emerges between Biff and Happy and Charley's son, Bernard: their lives are dribbling away on trivialities while Bernard has earned success.

Next to these overwhelming failures Willy can posit only a paid-off mortgage and a life insurance policy. The former is finally an empty victory:

Work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there's nobody to live in it. (Collected Plays, 133)

And the latter demands his death.

One cannot justifiably blame the positive laws that dictate his world for Willy's failure. Other men manage to meet payments, succeed in business, raise admirable children, and retain their dignity among their peers. Miller has pointed out that, far from intending to censure a profession or a society, his aim was

To speak commonsensically of social facts which every businessman knows and talks about but which are too prosaic to mention or are usually fancied up on the stage as philosophical problems. When a man gets old you fire him, you have to, he can't do the work. To speak and even to celebrate the common sense of businessmen, who love the personality that wins the day but know that you've got to have the right goods at the right price, handsome and well-spoken as you are.<sup>3</sup>

Willy's practical failure does not in itself stand as an indictment of anything, does not reach beyond positive law to offer us an insight into



natural law and thus a better way to live. It simply illustrates certain truths about the way things are: some men succeed, some fail; old friends die, old promises are forgotten; the human failing in a moment of loneliness can reverberate tragically through a life. In this play natural law emerges from the conflict between positive and psychological laws--between, simply, what is and what Willy dreams. The lesson it brings is a gentle one, befitting the play's lyrical grace, but it is nevertheless compelling: that the price one pays for selling oneself an illusory world may be one's life. "[H]uman kind," Eliot writes, "Cannot bear very much reality"<sup>4</sup>; but to survive, it must try. Perhaps because its lesson emerges so fluently from its action, Salesman is celebrated as Miller's finest play, truly a contribution to human experience rather than to human knowledge.

Positive law bears down relentlessly on the world of The Crucible, too. Miller observes in his notes to the play that the repressive laws which made it possible for seventeenth-century Salem to thrive in an austere land were the very ones which threatened its existence when the land became civilized:





Evidently the time came in New England when the repressions of order were heavier than seemed warranted by the dangers against which the order was organized. The witch-hunt was a perverse manifestation of the panic which set in among all classes when the balance began to turn toward greater individual freedom. . . . It is still impossible for man to organize his social life without repressions, and the balance has yet to be struck between order and freedom.

(Collected Plays, 228-9)

Salem lived beneath a stifling tent of social, legal, moral, religious, and familial restrictions. In the name of the community's welfare, everyone took it upon himself to mind his neighbour's business. Dancing, and every carnal indulgence that did not lead to the godly propagation of the population, was regarded as a mortal sin. The religion preached and practised was ascetic and rigid. Proctor censures Parris on this account:

I have trouble enough without I come five mile to hear him preach only hellfire and bloody damnation. Take it to heart, Mr. Parris. There are many others who stay away from church these days because you hardly ever mention God any more.

(Collected Plays, 245)

Later in the play Hale doubts Proctor's sincerity because he fails to recall one of the Commandments, and Cheever reduces him in Danforth's sight by revealing that "He plow on Sunday, sir.") Others are judged guilty or innocent largely on the strength of their religious devotion. Moral law, of course, is synonymous here with religious law. Proctor's adultery damns him in the terms of both.



Where religion exercises such fanatic control over a society, its cold rigidity must freeze even the most humane institutions. Hence familial affection is inhibited: children are made to fit a mould, and Miller says

until this strange crisis he [Parris], like the rest of Salem, never conceived that the children were anything but thankful for being permitted to walk straight, eyes slightly lowered, arms at the sides, and mouths shut until bidden to speak. (Collected Plays, 225)

The inhibitions bred of this kind of training scar later relationships too; Elizabeth Proctor at last admits that

I have sins of my own to count. It needs a cold wife to prompt lechery. (Collected Plays, 323)

Justice, too, is crippled by the omnipresent repressions.

The court is the one avenue through which grievances may be honorably and absolutely settled, and so the court becomes an arbiter of petty problems. Parris demands the deed to his house when he becomes Salem's rector, a move which suggests infinite suspicion in all levels of the society. Arguments over boundaries erupt repeatedly throughout the play. And this narrow "mine-thine" attitude indicates the resentment and vengeance burning where all other human emotion has been closed off. Nowhere is it more evident than in the trials, and there, it is most terribly embodied in Danforth:





You must understand, sir, that a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between. This is a sharp time, now, a precise time--we live no longer in the dusky afternoon when evil mixed itself with good and befuddled the world.  
(Collected Plays, 293)

That the man is perfectly convinced of his position only makes it more terrible. Faced with the alternatives of condemning all, even the innocent, and freeing some of the innocent condemned who remain alive, he chooses the former, because

I cannot pardon these when twelve are already hanged for the same crime. It is not just.  
(Collected Plays, 317)

To such extremes may the letter of the law be carried.

Natural law is partially represented by three characters in this play. Rebecca Nurse speaks for a simple love and common sense when others cry witchcraft, and goes to her death on the strength of her refusal to accept the latter. Reverend Hale is susceptible to popular superstition to a greater degree than she is, but on the whole he is a well-meaning man, with an ability to see his own falsehood and to admit it:

I came into this village like a bridegroom to his beloved, bearing gifts of high religion; the very crowns of holy law I brought, and what I touched with my bright confidence, it died; and where I turned the eye of my great faith, blood flowed up. Beware, Goody Proctor--cleave to no faith when faith brings blood. It is mistaken law that leads you to sacrifice.

(Collected Plays, 320)



This, at least, is a call for life in a world that is plunging itself headlong into annihilation. John Proctor's call is for more than simply life; it is for dignity, responsibility, and sanity, those things that make life meaningful to the conscious man. He is a man of few, but trenchant, words: he speaks out frankly against Parris' preaching, against his wife's injustice to him, against the men who come to accuse her, against the court itself. His attack on Elizabeth's accusers is especially vivid:

never

Why do you wonder if Parris be innocent, or Abigail? Is the accuser always holy now? Were they born this morning as clean as God's fingers? I'll tell you what's walking Salem--vengeance is walking Salem. We are what we always were in Salem, but now the little crazy children are jangling the keys of the kingdom, and common vengeance writes the law! This warrant's vengeance! I'll not give my wife to vengeance!

(Collected Plays, 281)

Proctor is fully realized as a conscious and tragic figure. He is indeed Herculean in his consciousness, and does express the natural law implicit in Salesman, but he remains human, vulnerable, and believable, for reasons which I shall explore in the next chapter.

A View From the Bridge deals primarily with unsophisticated people, but it is narrated from the perspective of a conscious observer, Alfieri. Alfieri, a lawyer, can do nothing positive to halt the chain





of events which only he can foresee; one of the play's most compelling thematic lines of development is the impotence of positive law before a determined individual.

Eddie Carbone breaks his society's law by harbouring illegal immigrants and breaks his code of honour by betraying them. But the friction between these does not drive him to his death--indeed, Alfieri knows about the immigrants and blinks at their entry. Eddie's real betrayal occurs on a deeper psychological level which is exposed by the surface play of law. In his struggle, social law is powerless. Alfieri says

It wasn't as though there was a mystery to unravel. I could see every step coming, step after step, like a dark figure walking down a hall toward a certain door. I knew where he was heading for, I knew where he was going to end. And I sat here many afternoons asking myself why, being an intelligent man, I was so powerless to stop it. (Collected Plays, 410)

When Eddie seeks his legal help he can offer only negatives: "I don't quite understand what I can do for you. Is there a question of law somewhere?" . . . "You have no recourse in the law, Eddie" . . . "The law is not interested in this." And yet again, defining the relationship between positive and natural law:

I'm not only telling you now, I'm warning you--the law is nature. The law is only a word for what has a right to happen. When the law is wrong it's because it's unnatural, but in this case it is natural and a river will drown you if you buck it now. (Collected Plays, 424)



Other instances of law appear too. There is the relentless law of economics that brings Marco and Rodolpho to live with the Carbones; the force of prejudice, which judges Rodolpho because he is an outsider, and different; the force of public opinion that judges Eddie for betraying the immigrants. There is, too, the moral law against incest and adultery, the obligation of one relative to another, the painful law of growth and change that says children must move on, must build their own lives.

Alfieri's point is valid: when temporal law or convention seems unjust, it is because it is unnatural, it has failed to accommodate the exigencies of the human condition.<sup>5</sup> As observer and spokesman, he emphasizes the rightness of the laws Eddie transgresses. (He is also, according to Sheila Huftel, "the effect of the audience's reaction to The Crucible. Miller was discouraged by their failure to grasp the play's central theme. . . . Alfieri is Miller's insurance that the audience will at least know the playwright's interpretation."<sup>6</sup>) Except for Alfieri's presence (which does not, I think, detract at all from the play's dramatic impact), natural law emerges from this play in much the same way that it emerges from Death of a Salesman. What is collides with one man's fanatic dream, and the tragic outcome affirms the validity (or at





least the social necessity) of the reality which he opposes.

A Memory of Two Mondays is a plotless interlude whose spirit, if not precise content, is drawn from Miller's adolescent experience as a warehouse clerk. In a certain mild sense it does what Miller says a drama should do--tells how men "make of the outside world a home"--and is what he says drama should be--a "species of jurisprudence." But at the same time it is the closest he ever gets to the "mood" play: its two parts capture and contrast the tone of two Monday mornings in the lives of a handful of very ordinary people. Miller calls it

a kind of letter to that sub-culture where the sinews of the economy are rooted, that darkest Africa of our society from whose interior only the sketchiest messages ever reach our literature or our stage.<sup>7</sup>

His aim in writing it, he says, was

to define for myself the value of hope, why it must arise, as well as the heroism of those who know, at least, how to endure its absence.<sup>8</sup>

There is very little hope in the play. Its characters are enthralled by those positive laws that arbitrate mercilessly the scope of the lives of our "sub-culture"--economics and education. Their fears and worries are about rent, family, the price of a car, the opinion of the boss. Their pleasures are similarly limited: sex,



alcohol, and in Kenneth's case, a little poetry. None of them is particularly conscious of his situation; only the boy, Bert, sees the pathos and monotony and small graces of their lives in terms of a world of larger possibilities. He represents the "hope" in the play: he will move out of this nether world, go to college, discover a richer life. There is an obvious paradox in this, and it is central to Miller's philosophy. Bert aspires, and so he will grow in awareness, but his relationship to the psychological concerns of the play will probably not change: loneliness, love, friendship, fear, willpower and the lack of it co-exist on all levels of consciousness. Bert's hope is in his ability to comprehend, for, to Miller, "meaning is the ultimate reward for having lived."<sup>9</sup>

The natural law that emerges from this play, or the "Law" that the play engages, is a testament to the human ability to hope, and cling to a goal, and endure, even without a goal. Miller successfully conveys the existential agonies that can arise among even the least sophisticated.

After the Fall is a cerebral, psychological drama, but it, too, is rooted in the positive laws that determine what individuals in society are to do, to think, and to believe. The most striking





convention in the play is at once broadly "legal," in the sense that it has been an accepted formative principle in our civilization, and psychological. I refer to the convention of dualistic thought: that philosophical structure which divides the world into opposing camps of good and evil, right and wrong, and admits of no syntheses. Quentin, the play's protagonist, is a classical example of what dualism means to a man in this century. Like Saul Bellow's Herzog, his endless intellectualizing is an effort to reach something human beyond intellect; he seeks reality through the laws of semantics, philosophy, and psychology. His search illuminates the astounding degree to which our society is bound by the principles of arbitrary right and wrong, and their concurrent psychological states, innocence and guilt. I shall discuss these in more depth in Chapter III; it is sufficient here to remark their power as social determinants.

Other less pivotal manifestations of the workings of positive law appear throughout the play. There is the law of success, which says that a man must justify his existence before his fellows in professional or economic terms. There is the law of business, which places the welfare of the company over the humanity of the individuals who comprise it. There is the law of filial responsibility, expressed by Quentin's mother:



I wasn't allowed to see your father till his father and Grandpa had agreed [on the marriage]/! . . . Because, I decided for once somebody was not going to break my mother's heart. . .

(After the Fall, 19)

and implicitly expressed by his father and brother. The laws and conventions that circumscribe marriage recur through the play, often implicitly by the condemnation or approbation of adultery. The hypocrisy in the convention of friendship is laid bare when Mickey dares to destroy his friend, Lou, to redeem himself. And in this incident, involving a Federal investigation of ex-Communists, the superstructure of laws that dictate the limits of individual freedom is called into focus. The stone tower of the concentration camp similarly forces attention on a kind of social law, and hints at psychological law too. A whole treatise on the failure of mass education to equip individuals for life under the law of their country may be read into Maggie's total helplessness and vulnerability before her legal "advisors," who, in Quentin's words, have her on a table and are carving her. The contrast between the illusion of civilized legality and the fact of barbaric opportunism is striking.

Where Miller's previous dramas have acknowledged the validity and sanctity of some social, positive laws, as man's attempt to approximate natural law, After the Fall repudiates the whole contemporary





interpretation of positive law. With the exception of Holga, and eventually of Quentin, all the characters in the play are bound by their incurious subservience to positive law; each has denied the responsibility I have mentioned to assess and oppose, as well as to obey, this law. The net result of this is that each of them has slightly modified, or reconstructed, positive law in terms of his own egotistical needs, so that positive law, instead of being a unified and comprehensible approximation of natural law, becomes the perversion of an infinite number of prejudices. The development suggests moral laxity; it is hardly unusual that Miller should oppose it. Quentin's drama is his search for the natural law whose temporal approximation has been buried. His quest is intellectual, slicing through the defenses his own mind has constructed, and so it ends at last in an expression of intellectual comprehension: the natural law discovered is that the "knowing" is all.

In Incident at Vichy Miller takes this train of thought a step further. This play, too, is in part about the illusions of reality which men will accept as truth, and which will blind them to the Law, the real truth. Where in After the Fall Quentin exposes conventional laws for the evasions they are, in this play the interaction



of the characters reveals who is "selling out" to a lie and who is seeking truth. Because the action is no longer channeled through one character, but instead comes to the viewer as the expression of many diverse characters whom he encounters directly, Incident at Vichy admits an element of understanding not possible in After the Fall. It is finally possible to feel with these waiting men, and to understand why his particular bias is vital to each even as one realizes it is a bias.

The illusions manifested are best considered in my next chapter, under psychological law; they are very literally defenses against an intolerable reality. Normal positive law, which allows a measure of individual freedom and responsibility to those who live under it, is suspended in this play. The world of comprehensible fact and ritual is shattered by the irrational surge of Nazi tyranny. Positive law is solidified into a rigid code under which, as in The Crucible, only the betrayers of their own humanity are safe. Deprived of any viable general law by which to define themselves, those who would cling to their humanity must rely on the personal illusions and justifications which give some meaning and purpose to their lives.





Leduc, the psychiatrist, is the most conscious and articulate of the prisoners, and has the least illusions. The natural law which this play engages emerges from Leduc's arguments with the other men, and is at last asserted by Von Berg's action. It involves psychological law insofar as it points out that when a man becomes conscious of his human responsibility, he must, in his own name, go to any lengths to fulfill it. To do less is to forfeit one's humanity.

It appears from the preceding that one of the dominant drives of Miller's drama is a compulsion to discover and illustrate how the individual may find and justify his own humanity in the face of social determinism. If he is faithful to his quest his reach is always toward an intuitively, intellectually, or emotionally apprehended natural law. He may reach and reveal the law, or he may reveal it by his failure to reach it. In either case, the quest, rather than its goal, is the psychological necessity; in my next chapter I shall try to explain why this should be so, and trace its implications through the plays.



## CHAPTER III

### PSYCHE: LAW AND THE INDIVIDUAL

An alternative to cooperation with positive law is open to the man who wishes to "make of the outside world a home." It is a hazardous alternative, but one engaged in, at least in part, by all men. I speak of subjective reconstructing. To one who feels or actually is incapable of opposing the social determinism surrounding him, the world is a mesmerizing menace. To one who is so incapable of opposing social determinism that he is unaware of its presence, the world seems simpler than it is. To one who has transcended the determinism life is solitary and terrible, for beyond society there can be no sanctioned meaning. These three types seek meaning and identity in terms of their ego; the first in despair of totally comprehending his circumstances, the second in blind confidence of conquering them, and the third because he cannot accept any given order outside himself as inviolable. All Miller's protagonists are partial victims





of one of these three situations; Miller's interpretation of society, especially contemporary society, takes sensitive account of the varieties of individual alienation implicit in it.

If society is defined by its laws, man is defined by the ego which separates him from other men and which is a partly objective, partly subjective blend of fact and illusion. The most obvious symbol of the ego is a name, and so one finds throughout Miller's plays innumerable allusions to name, rank, reputation, and honour. Because of the human need for identity and value in a fluid, impersonal, deterministic world, the possession of a name assumes profound psychological importance. Positive law was first formalized in society as the "code of honour," a recognition of the sanctity of the name and of the need to protect it; contemporary civil law protects reputation as well as life and goods--and in civilized society reputation and life are interdependent. Thus positive law guards or condemns the individual's identity, his name, as necessary in its social context. But it deals only with the social context, and what it sanctions or condemns is what is generally approved or censured by society. Miller's drama eventually reaches beyond this, into the corners of the psyche where a man weighs what his name and



his identity mean to himself, and where he acts in accordance with these solipsistic determinants. Frequently his actions then contravene everything in the socially-acceptable cannon; nevertheless they are as socially and psychologically valid and necessary as their "approved" counterparts.<sup>1</sup> These actions, responses to dicta incomprehensible to positive law (which assumes a dualistic universe of arbitrary right and wrong), derive from what I call psychological law--law on its most personal level. Since it deals in part with subconscious feelings and desires it operates most forcefully under the conditions of dream, love, religious ecstasy, fear, rage, or some other form of dementia in which the rational and logical levels of the mind are immobilized.

With the exception of A Memory of Two Mondays, each of Miller's plays centers on an individual who, owing to crucial circumstances, is dominated by psychological law. Joe Keller has discovered that, in his sons' eyes, he is a murderer; Willy Loman has realized that his life's work adds up to almost nothing; John Proctor struggles toward self-knowledge through a crushing guilt; Eddie Carbone has staked his life on an incestuous passion; Quentin, in much the same position as Proctor, struggles to put his guilt into perspective; and Von Berg faces a challenge to the principles





by which he has lived. A situation impinging on each of these from outside himself drives each deep into himself to make a decision that will change the course of his life. The moment of decision is consequently intense and personal, bearing more the nature of an epiphany than the nature of rational choice. It is made as a private affirmation of life, and, by extension, of personal identity which is transcended in the process. It defies explanation, yet some measure of explanation is demanded by positive law, and perhaps even by the conscious psyche of the individual concerned.

This combination of an experientially intense situation and a more or less rational articulation of it results in what may be called tragedy (whether the articulation is formal or simply a verbal accessory to the action). In classical tragedy the articulation was also an explanation. As M. W. Steinberg has observed,<sup>2</sup> the outcome of a classical tragedy is predetermined by fate, and the tragedy itself purports to tell, rather than to ask, why such things must be so. Mr. Steinberg suggests that Miller's tragic drama is a combination of social determinism (which replaces the determinism of fate) and individual psychology. There is a constant tension between individual and society.



Since the Renaissance the emphasis in tragic drama seems to have been on "experience" not in the formalized sense of Classical drama but in a particularized, psychologically-subtle sense. Until the last two centuries this tragedy was played out in a well-ordered cosmos where heaven, earth, and hell had each a location and distinguishing characteristics. Even in a dramatist like Shakespeare the idea of an organic world-order is everywhere patent. But in the last two centuries man has scientifically explored his external cosmos and found in it no resting place for the soul; the consequence of this is that he has turned downward and inward, to the mysteries of his psyche in his search for spiritual identity. In a world which depends for its life on social order and on the rational cooperation of individuals, this turning to the psyche can only be regarded as anarchic and demonic. Yet Miller himself says that a "total onslaught by an individual against the seemingly stable cosmos surrounding us" is an essential component of modern tragedy,<sup>3</sup> and individual skepticism or opposition is at once the spur and the result of inwardness.

Thus it seems that Murray Kreiger's distinctions<sup>4</sup> between tragedy as a form (literary or philosophical) which expresses human





action in a closed cosmos and in relation to fixed, accepted norms of behaviour, and the tragic vision, which is a personal insight transcending all norms, is an apt distinction for understanding Miller's dramatic method and his themes. Tragedy concludes with a re-establishment of order; the tragic vision is anarchic and, in terms of the society it invades, demonic. Also in terms of society, it follows, says Professor Kreiger, that tragedy involves a visionary failing and the tragic vision a moral failing: because it subscribes to a moral (and hence arbitrary) structure, tragedy cannot achieve the visionary insight which must implicate the demonic, for such insight, or tragic vision, would shatter its moral structure. Modern man must choose, it seems, between morality and honesty.

Kreiger argues that the once-accepted universality of tragedy's moral framework is accepted no longer, and asks

is the tragic hero, as modern, fulfilling a proper human function and even a proper human obligation in standing with his integrity as an individual outside the universal? Which is another way of suggesting that whatever universals we may be left with do not deserve the obedience of the most daring of us. . . . Justice, then, has passed from the universal to the rebellious individual.<sup>5</sup>



The tragic hero as Kreiger conceives of him stretches for the zenith of consciousness beyond the determinism of an encapsulating society and its product, the blinkered mind. Perhaps his vision will sustain him, perhaps it will destroy him; either way it is finally good, for its example points out the human's potential. Joseph R. Royce makes the same point in a psychological context, and, although he too sees tragic possibilities in great consciousness, he is more optimistic (and perhaps less romantic) than Kreiger:

It may be that greater and greater visions of reality would be too much for the souls of men, and that such "seeing through" would drive them mad. My position on this point is that despite this risk, the relatively untapped mind of 20th-century man contains endless possibilities, and that we must at least remain open to new ways of experiencing.<sup>6</sup>

The motif of the century seems to be destruction of old norms; its hope, an imminent apocalypse.

Miller's drama begins in a conventionally ethical world, but the tensions between society, ethics, and the individual run through all his work. He has said that his plays are his own response to what was "in the air," and each "was begun in the belief that it was unveiling a truth already known but unrecognized as such"<sup>7</sup>; he has also said that he writes in order to define and comprehend his world.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, then, his art is at least in part his own search for truths by which to live. His earliest position is that there is an





absolute moral law, and it is discoverable. He deals at first with partially-conscious figures, men who, like Lear, are more earth-bound than they know and so dare greater than they can do. He finds their tragedy, and their greatness, in their willingness to throw everything they have into the defense of their "truth." If the truth they cherish is in fact a delusion, the drama will illuminate the social origin of the delusion and so will point out "the moral law, which is what the enlightenment of tragedy consists of."<sup>9</sup> At the time of that comment (1949) Miller regarded the "moral law" as an absolute which transcended society's positive laws and conventions. It was the highest good, the greatest insight, he could then conceive of; in short, natural law.

I shall try to show that as his drama develops Miller grows away from the idea of a fixed moral order. The growing-away parallels other growths, those of intellectual and psychological subtlety of characterization. Eventually he reaches toward the kind of conscious tragic height Kreiger and Royce conceive of as the contemporary heritage: Quentin, in After the Fall, stands resolute and solitary outside his past and its ethical structure. Miller's last play to date celebrates the tragic courage of the man who can accept responsibility for his ideals, even while seeing their limita-



tions: it is a turning again to the ethical order, but there is a distinct difference of vision.

In Miller's world men are never innocent; they are tortured by guilt (consciously or subconsciously) until they attain a real or illusory (but personally valid) "truth," and with this knowledge comes the ability to bear their guilt or to expiate it. The origin of guilt is lack of comprehension or lack of perspective, and only through growth and suffering can it be endured. Always, the effort to account for guilt is made in the character's own name: perhaps more than he realizes, Miller's is the Kreigerian drama of the rebellious individual who judges himself.

Throughout Miller's plays, then, run the interlocking themes of psychological law--the name, tragedy, the tragic vision, the demonic, guilt, innocence, and responsibility. It is these to which I shall now turn to trace out their development.

As I have already noted in Chapter II, the positive law that dominates All My Sons is cutthroat materialism. Joe Keller, a shrewd but uneducated man, subscribes to this creed of materialism because to his limited vision it seems the only creed by which a man may secure his place in the world. It drives him to betray a friend and abet a murder, and he tries to rationalize even these ex-





cesses as necessary for the welfare of his family. But he cannot evade the consciousness of having violated a moral order: a heightened awareness of criminal law's machinations seems to haunt his subconscious. He takes a childlike pride in playing chief of police to neighbourhood children, pretends there is a jail in his basement, and repeatedly recalls the "facts" of his case and the fate of his partner; it is as though a subconscious guilt drives him to tempt discovery again and again. Similarly, his eagerness to please Chris suggests the uneasiness of a man who is conscious of having estranged himself from the object of his love, and who seeks forgiveness and absolution. His decision to put "a new sign over the plant--Christopher Keller, Incorporated," suggests that he would like to erase or hide his own name, and his frenetic assertions to Chris that his is "good money, there's nothing wrong with that money" raise doubts to the contrary.

Because Joe is a creature of instinct, only uneasily in control of his environment, both action and reaction in this play are motivated by psychological law. A helpless dread of social and financial failure, of failure to his family and to his name, motivates his initial crime. But the crime is an act against the very society in which he seeks asylum, and by committing it and escaping unpunished he un-



wittingly undermines his own security forever. The burden of guilt is alienating; he forfeits his innocence and sets himself up against the society he would submerge himself in. The strain of sustaining a two-faced existence in this society accounts for his subconscious efforts to expose his guilt. He has in fact reached the point of tragic vision where he can no longer rely on a judge outside himself, and so, not comprehending this, he turns everywhere in search of such a judge. He is drawn to Chris because Chris represents the humane ideals he has violated and the innocence he has lost. "My only accomplishment," he observes to Ann, "is my son." The need to leave a flawless creation is compelling. But to endure his own guilt it is necessary that Joe should involve Chris--and should thus mar the perfection of his own creation. And so in his own name, finally, he reveals his guilt and Chris's share in it: "Chris. . .Chris, I did it for you."

The revelation stuns Chris because it forces him to choose between his love for his father and his idealism, and clearly, Joe has counted on the former. With his son implicated, he can bear his guilt. He tries to explain this reciprocal familial loyalty to his wife:





Keller: There's nothin' he could do that I wouldn't forgive. Because he's my son. Because I'm his father and he's my son.

Mother: Joe, I tell you--

Keller: Nothin's bigger than that. And you're goin' to tell him, you understand. I'm his father and he's my son, and if there's something bigger than that I'll put a bullet in my head!

(Collected Plays, 120)

The whole thrust of the play, of course, is toward the realization that there is "something bigger than that."

Like so many of Miller's heroes, Chris is too conscious of his own guilt to accuse another. When his mother asks what he could do with his criminal father, he cries helplessly

I could jail him! I could jail him, if I were human any more. But I'm like everybody else now. I'm practical now. You made me practical. . . I'm practical, and I spit on myself.

(Collected Plays, 123)

It is not love, but a recognition of his own implication that immobilizes him. At this point the play is at an impasse; Joe has found neither the absolution nor the complicity his guilt requires. But to pursue the theme of psychological law I must turn back to Joe's observation on his dead son, Larry. He compares Larry with the guilt-ridden Chris:



Goddam, if Larry was alive he wouldn't act like this. He understood the way the world is made. He listened to me. To him the world had a forty-foot front, and it ended at the building line. This one, everything bothers him.

(Collected Plays, 121)

Even before hearing Chris's decision not to turn his father in, Joe has turned to his other son for justification. This illusion, at least, is safe: Larry is dead. But at last the past he has tried to exorcise catches up with Joe. Larry's letter reveals that, unable to bear his father's crime, Larry had killed himself. Like all suicides, it implies a murder; indeed, the letter says "if I had him there now I could kill him." For Joe there are no more crutches, no more accomplices; he is forced to accept his guilt for what it is, and accept it alone. The psychological need for love and acceptance that drove him to reveal his crime drives him further, into the realization that he has forfeited his right to these comforts forever. And so when his wife says Larry would never tell him to give himself up he can say

Then what is this if it isn't telling me? Sure, he was my son. But I think to him they were all my sons. And I guess they were, I guess they were.

(Collected Plays, 126)

Chris expands this awareness into a responsibility:





Chris: . . .It's not enough for him to be sorry. Larry didn't kill himself to make you and Dad sorry.

Mother: What more can we be!

Chris: You can be better! Once and for all you can know there's a universe of people outside and you're responsible to it, and unless you know that, you threw away your son because that's why he died.

(Collected Plays, 126-7)

Joe, like Larry, kills himself in reparation to a universe he has just discovered responsibility for. He judges and murders the murderer he has found within himself. His illumination, which spreads out to inform his family, justifies his death. He could not live alone with the knowledge of his guilt; in terms of his psychological development he was left with no choice but the reaction of suicide, at once an admission and a reparation.

Willy Loman, like Keller, spends his life in pursuit of the chimerical ideals of the success ethic. Also like Keller, he is misled by his environment through lack of comprehension of it, and responds to his situation in terms of psychological law. He carries a heavy burden of guilt; I have noted in Chapter II how he has failed in all the conventional areas where a man proves himself to his society. But he is a much greater man than Joe Keller, for he has nothing of the mean caution of the arriviste. He faces life with an innocent



dream, a vision of a Utopian world where success comes easily, prosperity abounds, and men live in genuine friendliness with one another. Expecting these, he is himself openhearted and idealistic, and so life, for him, is an endless disappointment. The comparison that returns to me inevitably is King Lear, who is also misled by expectations of a simple world designed for his pleasure and success. Critics who object to the social determinism in Salesman might do well to recall Lear, where, on a different social level, precisely parallel determinism appears: both men have a false idea of what is, both are consequently open and trusting, both meet disappointment and disillusion in unbearable proportions, yet endure them, and both eventually transcend the determinism of their position to affirm the value of their lives poetically, in human relationships.

The comparison with Lear may be extended when one regards the importance both men attach to their name. Lear has a tradition of monarchy to uphold, Loman has a tradition of economic success to uphold; each is proud of his past and proud of himself, as heir to it. Linda and Charley recognize the importance of Willy's self-respect, and try to protect it, but beyond their compassionate gaze Willy meets a world where his value is reckoned with ruthless im-





personality. Too old to work, he is fired. It is a fact of life; he is only one of millions of men who must learn to accept it. Biff, too young to realize that Willy is the one man in those millions who cannot learn to accept it, adds his crushing accusation to Willy's burden:

Biff: Pop! I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you!

Willy: (Turning on him now in an uncontrolled outburst):  
I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!

(Collected Plays, 217)

Willy's dignity is indefatigable; he will not have his name, his individual human identity, equated with a commercial value, and his tragic greatness comes from his intransigence on this point.

Willy never reaches the point of tragic vision where he sees the totality of his failure and decides, like Keller, to kill himself rather than live alone with his guilt. Instead, the accumulation of failure intensifies his feeling of guilt, and of responsibility to the family he has failed, until he comes to believe that only the ultimate sacrifice on his part can make it possible for his sons to succeed. Inadvertently, Biff propels him toward suicide when he reveals that he, the son whom Willy's indiscretion had estranged, actually loves his father. Biff's cry:



Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens?  
(Collected Plays, 217)

elicits only

Isn't that--isn't that remarkable? Biff--he likes me!  
(Collected Plays, 218)

The discovery of Biff's love makes suicide a possible, and even obligatory, step. Willy muses,

Can you imagine that magnificence with twenty thousand dollars in his pocket? . . . Oh Ben, I always knew one way or another we were gonna make it, Biff and I!

(Collected Plays, 219)

His death is tragic, for while his family sees only a man destroying himself, Willy himself believes that death is a victory. In terms of his perception, it is the greatest gift of love he can make, and he makes it in recognition of the most important discovery of his life--not his guilt, but the fact that he is loved in spite of his guilt.

Loman's attempt to "make of the outside world a home" is almost entirely a subjective reconstruction of it. His psychological tendency toward the vague, the lyrical, and the imaginary is directly caused by the world around him: wherever he turns, he is "thingified"--made equivalent to the sum of the things attributed to him after mere fact. His spirit, crying out against this inhumanity, constructs





a lyrical dream world to counter the dessication of the real world. Nowhere is this more poignantly evident than in the scene in the garden, when Willy, almost overtaken by madness, starts planting vegetables and talking over his suicide with his ephemeral brother. It will be, he says, in part for Linda ("Cause she's suffered, Ben, the woman has suffered"), in part for Biff ("Because he thinks I'm nothing, see, and so he spites me"), and in part for himself, because "a man can't go out the way he came in, Ben, a man has got to add up to something." In this scene all Willy's fragile dreaming is symbolized by the seeds he plants: he knows they will not grow. But something perversely trusting in him compels him to try again, to hope for yet another miracle. It is just this hope, and the joyous dignity that goes with it, that makes Willy one of Miller's two truly great, truly human protagonists. Willy affirms the value of dreams in a world hedged in by empirical truths. Temperamentally antithetical, but poetically akin, Quentin, of After the Fall, affirms the value of truth in a world blinded by illusions.

John Proctor is Quentin's forerunner, Miller's first experiment with a highly-conscious, rational protagonist. In the inverted world of The Crucible he emerges as a fully human, "modern"



hero, plagued from without by an absurd society and from within by a tremendous guilt. Eric Bentley maintains the opposite of this in his essay, "The Innocence of Arthur Miller." Calling Miller a "dramatist of indignation," he holds that Miller's characters are expressed in the black-and-white absolutes of melodrama. "The Crucible is a melodrama," he says, "because, although the hero has weaknesses, he has no faults. His innocence is unreal because it is total."<sup>10</sup> This view overlooks a central fact of the play: that it was Proctor's adultery which moved Abigail to seek his wife's death. Until after Proctor turned her advances down at Betty Parris' bedside, she seemed as frightened by the child's trance as anyone. There is a considerable interval during which tensions mount, animosities are bared, and the whisper of "witchcraft" rises. Hale's arrival gives credence to the rumour of witchcraft, and his interrogation of Tituba exacts a terrified "confession" from her. It seems to me that at this point Abigail realized how to take double advantage of the situation: by swearing to have seen witches herself, and avowing her desire to reveal them, she could escape punishment for her midnight escapade and also, perhaps, take vengeance on Proctor. At any rate, Proctor is involved in Abigail's guilt from the start, knows it, and is tortured by it. For





not only has he committed the foulest sin conceivable by his Puritan society--lechery--he has also roused the Faustian will in one who cannot live with it. In one of the few places where we can believe Abigail, she cries out to him with all the agony of one who knows too much to bear alone:

I look for John Proctor that took me from my sleep and put knowledge in my heart! I never knew what pretense Salem was, I never knew the lying lessons I was taught by all these Christian women and their covenanted men! And now you bid me tear the light out of my eyes? I will not, I cannot! You loved me, John Proctor, and whatever sin it is, you love me yet! . . . John, pity me, pity me!

(Collected Plays, 241)

Her charge of his love is probably true; they are both strong characters who dare to defy convention, and so share a fundamental communion. The proselytizer's pride that drew Proctor to her ultimately damns him, just as Quentin's pride, which motivated him to become Maggie's mentor, damns him. Proctor can live with his skepticism; he is his own master. Abigail cannot, and so her revenge erupts in the only way it can: through the superstitious credulity of the town. In the terms of the play she and Proctor both reach a point of tragic vision, and because of it are isolated forever from the social context which, until then, had given their lives meaning. They represent two possible ways of dealing with tragic vision:



Abigail, the demonic, and Proctor, the ethical. Forbidden all other outlets for despair, Abigail (like Iago) takes revenge on the innocent. Proctor, conscious that he is himself responsible for his own unbearable knowledge, adopts the position of Conrad's Marlow, and tries to live out the absurdity he sees.

Since Proctor is conscious, and therefore not likely to be gulled by his own illusions, the tragedy of his situation must be brought out by emphasizing the unconscious, irrational nature of the world around him, and its ability to impose its will on him. His constant conflict with this society bewilders, troubles, and isolates him; his awareness of his own responsibility for the terrible events taking place whets his guilt and eventually drives him to damn his own name by admitting to lechery to prove his wife's innocence. The effort fails. Spiritually stripped, he is still too conscious of his guilt--a psychological guilt before himself--to die the death of a martyr. He says to Elizabeth

I'd have you see some honesty in it. Let them that never lied die now to keep their souls. It is pretense for me, a vanity that will not blind God nor keep my children out of the wind. What say you?  
(Collected Plays, 323)

She replies only

Do what you will. But let none be your judge. There be no higher judge under Heaven than Proctor is!  
(Collected Plays, 323)





This, of course, is the truth that John Proctor, skeptic, has believed all along. But faced with the responsibility of actually judging himself, he quails in all-too-human humility. He continues to cry for a judge outside himself, and, finding none, decides to "confess" to witchcraft. But he refuses to sign his confession. From this point his name carries more than social relevance; he says he will not sign

Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life!  
Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the  
dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name?  
I have given you my soul; leave me my name!

(Collected Plays, 328)

And he finds at bottom of the humility that prompted his confession an identity and a judgement: he is not as good as some who hang, but he has the virtue of being incapable of compromising his integrity longer before bigots and assassins. He finds not only his guilt, but the limits of his responsibility for the whole witch hunt. He is not the only guilty one, nor the guiltiest of all. Thus he tells the judges that he can hang:

And there's your first marvel, that I can. You have made your magic now, for I do think I see some shred of goodness in John Proctor. Not enough to weave a banner with, but white enough to keep it from such dogs.

(Collected Plays, 328)

For Proctor the discovery of his own value does nothing to lessen the horror of his tragic vision, but it does shift the center of guilt for the



situation he sees from his shoulders to the folly of preceding generations, which let the situation develop. The resurrection of this much from the nightmare that surrounds him is enough; as with Quentin, the "knowing" is all.

In A View From the Bridge Miller again contrasts demonic and ethical, in the persons of Eddie Carbone and Alfieri, respectively. But both demonic and ethical in this play lie to this side of tragic vision. Alfieri believes in the rightness, the morality, of the law he practises; he believes in it as if it were a sanctioned absolute. Carbone knows that he is breaking this law; he breaks it not because he sees a greater truth beyond it, but because he cannot help his emotions. (Perhaps I should here recall one of my statements in Chapter II; that to the extent that a man is conscious and in control of his relationship to his environment, he ceases to be tragic. By this reasoning, Carbone is more tragic than Proctor, because he fails to evaluate himself and his environment wisely, whereas Proctor does not fail.) Like Willy Loman, Carbone is dominated by a single passion; where Willy strives for recognition in his sons' eyes, Eddie strives to hold onto the niece whom he adores. He reconstructs his universe subjectively in terms of this passion: everything is seen as a threat to Catherine. His fetish reaches the demonic when he





begins to accuse and affront Rodolpho--the only way he can justify his desire to keep Rodolpho and Catherine apart--and when he turns Rodolpho and Marco over to the immigration authorities.

Like Joe Keller, however, Eddie seems to wish subconsciously to be judged for his crime. He insists throughout the play on having the respect due to him, and, after his betrayal of the cousins, cries "I want my name." The conscious level of his mind will admit only the facts he has willed it to admit: that Rodolpho is marrying Catherine in order to gain citizenship, and so must be stopped. Beatrice faces him with the real truth:

Eddie, listen to me. Who could give you your name? Listen to me. . . . That's not what you want. . . . You want somethin' else, Eddie, and you can never have her!

(Collected Plays, 437)

His real need is to assure himself of his honour, or at least to shut out any suspicion of his dishonourableness. Eddie eventually talks himself into a corner where he has to live out the delusion he began. He cannot admit before his neighbours that he had in fact turned the cousins in; if he did so he could no longer live in the neighbourhood. Yet he does not avoid the final confrontation with Marco, because if he did that he could no longer live with himself--he would have acknowledged the truth Beatrice pointed out. His only course is to fight



Marco, and to try to kill him and so bury the truth forever; he drives himself subconsciously to this extreme.

At the last Eddie recognizes his own deepest psychological motives, and their evil in terms of his society, but for the knowledge he pays his life. The first version of this play, ending with a dying Eddie crying "Catherine, why?" is dramatically more powerful than the second, which ends with Eddie reconciled to Beatrice. For the great mystery remains, to him, why such illicit passions as his should exist. In the first version I think Miller touches on a real truth of life: that social mores are arbitrary and often alien to man's true nature. In the second version he turns moralist again and asserts through Eddie the inviolability of those mores. The first attitude is close to tragic vision, the second belongs to tragedy.

Psychological law works relentlessly through A Memory of Two Mondays, unknown to the characters. Just as their social circumstances are determined largely without their comprehension, so are their psychological responses. There is no tragedy and no tragic vision in this play; it is, instead, a portrayal of the kind of men who do not stand on their dignity before their fate, do not care enough or dare enough to oppose the determinism around them. They are largely numb to guilt, innocence, and any philosophically significant





responsibility. The demonic is beyond their reach. Their names have little profound relevance to them, because their over-all consciousness is slight. And yet, in spite of their psychological poverty, each comes through as a recognizable person with a poignantly insistent individuality.

Each has an illusion that makes his life bearable, and the psychological element of the play is in the interaction and progression of these illusions. It is perhaps too much to say that each has subjectively reconstructed his world--none has sufficient individual passion for that--but each does approach the world with certain naïve illusions which contrast ironically with the reality of his situation. Thus Kenneth, the gentle and kindly young Irishman, believes in poetry, sunshine, chivalry, and innocence. In the course of the year he turns to alcohol, forgets his ideals, and becomes a victim of an almost uncomprehended despair. Similarly Gus, the old, obese Slav, thinks of himself as a gay man-about-town living high behind his wife's back. But her death plunges him, too, into a numb despair that even his orgies cannot dispel. Raymond, the harassed manager, survives by believing himself to be important; in fact, he is just a third-rate man in a third-rate job. Larry, a younger Gus, finds excitement in a new car and a flirtation with



Patricia; a year teaches him that he cannot afford the car, and the girl, too, seems about to become a liability. Patricia herself sought adventure with Larry, who, to her limited vision, seemed worldly; a year later she, too, is disillusioned and probably no longer innocent. Jerry and Willy, Frank and Jim, are all colorless personalities, brightening their days with a little illicit titillation or vanity, and otherwise undirected.

Others attain a kind of pathetic triumph. Agnes, the middle-aged spinster, lives through her feeling for others and gains some pleasure from their vitality. Tommy, the alcoholic who has obviously reached that state in an effort to <sup>+</sup>stave off despair, succeeds in retrieving himself and resuming his monotonous tasks. And Bert, the college-bound boy, holds onto his ideal in spite of the lassitude around him. These three prove that even the most dehumanizing position can be made bearable by a courageously-held purpose, and the fact that they are the only characters who attain anything like a triumph over their environment suggests that Miller is pointing out the necessity of commitment to a belief even in the face of despair.

In After the Fall the illusions to which the characters of A





Memory of Two Mondays resort to give their lives meaning are seen as generalized and accepted "positive laws," and are, as I have pointed out in Chapter II, served unquestioningly. Thus one finds an inversion of Willy Loman's position in this play: Loman cherished an illusion in the face of truth; Quentin seeks truth in a myriad of illusions which have usurped the stature of truth.

Early in the play Quentin points out that his profession as a defender of positive law has lost its meaning for him:

it just got to where I couldn't concentrate on a case any more; not the way I used to. It's hard to describe; it all lost its necessity; I was going on because I'd started out to become a successful attorney, and I'd become one--I felt I was merely in the service of my own success. There has to be some semblance of a point, and I couldn't find it any more.

(After the Fall, 3)

This is the intellectual questioning that neither Willy Loman nor any of the characters in Mondays reach. The collapse of the success ethic has deeper roots:

more and more I see that for many years I looked at life like a case at law. It was a series of proofs. When you're young you prove how brave you are, or smart; then, what a good lover; then, a good father; finally, how wise, or powerful, or what-the-hell-ever. But underlying it all, I see now, there was a presumption. That one moved not in a dry circle but on an upward path toward some elevation, where. . . God knows what. . . I would be justified, or even condemned. A verdict, anyway. I think now that my disaster really began when I looked up one day. . . and the bench was empty. No judge in sight. And all that remained



was the endless argument with oneself, this pointless litigation of existence before an empty bench. . . .

(After the Fall, 4)

This is despair, the tragic vision of the ultimate absurdity of all things, and one can make a strong case for the argument that life begins beyond such despair. Quentin is aware of the possibility here; he says,

With all this darkness, the truth is that every morning when I awake, I'm full of hope!. . . . For an instant there's some. . . unformed promise in the air. . .if I could corner that hope, and find what it consists of and either kill it for a lie, or really make it mine. . . .

(After the Fall, 4)

The play is structured by his search for this hope, a search that swings back through even the most painful corners of his past.

The shoddy "evidence" he accumulated during his life is sufficient to earn him a giant guilt complex, and part of his growth in the play is an intellectual working out of his guilt in terms of his responsibilities to others. In many respects he is a more subtle version of John Proctor.

In search of meaning and relatedness he has left one wife. Louise, neurotically living out the illusion of martyred wife (a truth to her), waves a banner of "separateness" and innocence in his face and refuses to take any responsibility for their failure to communicate. Her hostility, and the terror beneath it, bristle





through the play:

Quentin, I am not a praise machine! I am not a blur and I am not your mother! I am a separate person!

(After the Fall, 46)

Quentin tries to justify the preoccupation she resents in terms of his profession and his commitment to Lou, the arraigned lawyer:

I can't bear to be a separate person! . . . when that decent, broken man who never wanted anything but the good of the world, sits across my desk. . . I don't know how to say that my interests are no longer the same as his, and that if he doesn't change I consign him to hell because we are separate persons.

(After the Fall, 46)

The commitment Quentin reveres most is just the one his society censures most. As he neglects his formal duty to Louise, so he earlier neglected his duty to his parents, and the betrayal is always in the name of some inner propulsion away from stalemate and toward vitality. What drives Quentin is in fact a demonic, Dionysiac element. Time after time he upsets his own stability and the stability of those whose lives impinge on his, in a restless, insatiable quest for meaning, and usually he finds meaning existing in that which is opposite to all prevailing values.

This perhaps accounts for his attraction to Maggie: as he later observes, she is a beautiful piece trying to take herself seriously, but when he first meets her, her simple frankness is closer to



honesty than anything he has met in his world of blinding illusions. Maggie, he believes, can love without hostility and accept herself without pretending to be innocent. He fails to see that she has the most terrible innocence of all--the inarticulateness that cannot distinguish a difference between guilt and innocence, responsibility and dependence. She is immensely vulnerable, but immensely strong too because she grasps the strength of others in the name of love, and drains it. At first Quentin is intoxicated by the power she offers him; later, he realizes the responsibility that goes with it, and realizes that he cannot take such responsibility upon himself. It is cruel, but inevitable: having raised Maggie's consciousness much as Proctor raised Abigail's, Quentin has to leave her to learn to bear her new knowledge. In her own way Maggie, like Abigail, turns demonic; she tries to destroy herself. Quentin sees the murder in the attempt and refuses to be taken in by it:

A suicide kills two people, Maggie. That's what it's for. So I'm removing myself and perhaps it will lose its point.

(After the Fall, 116)

There is a subtle tension between Quentin's desire to kill Maggie, his desire to save her, and his impulse to let her take her own life. In service to the second he tries to make her see that they have used one another:





we. . .loved each other's innocence as though to love enough what was not there would cover up what was. But there is an angel, and night and day he brings back to us exactly what we want to lose. And no chemical can kill him, no blindness dark enough to make him lose his way; so you must love him, he keeps truth in the world. . . . Do the hardest thing of all--see your own hatred, and live!

(After the Fall, 120)

She will not. The dramatic momentum rises, a frenzy grips Quentin. He struggles to take Maggie's barbiturates from her, crying "You won't kill me!", and the stage directions indicate the murderous instant:

suddenly, clearly, he lunges for her throat and lifts her in his grip.

(After the Fall, 125)

It is only an instant; Maggie lives. But the struggle gives Quentin an insight into his own nature that, at last, helps him to live with his guilt:

What can be so important to gamble her life to get? . . . . My innocence, you see? To get that back you kill most easily. . . . In whose name do you ever turn your back. . .but in your own?

(After the Fall, 126-7)

Thus Miller draws out the realization that pride, the devil's own sin, is in fact vital to man's growth and to his ultimate self-transcendence. In this play the heroic emerges, through countless small tragedies, out of the demonic; dualism is transcended, and the unity of creation and destruction is at last affirmed. Quentin



comes to this knowledge through a private repudiation of the positive laws that moulded him; Holga, who moves through the play as its most poignant embodiment of womanhood and wisdom, comes to it through the turmoil of the Nazi era. She knows that "no one is innocent they did not kill!" because, if nothing else, the survivors have the pride of their survival and cannot ever atone for it. Gradually Quentin realizes

what burning cities taught her and the death of love taught me-- that we are very dangerous!

( After the Fall, 128)

Recognition of his own capacity for murder blunts the edge of his Messianic "relatedness": he sees the consequences of pride, and with the wisdom he enters a profound new universe, both self-centered and self-transcendent. The "unformed promise" that lured him on is now explicit:

And that, that's why I wake each morning like a boy--even now, even now! I swear to you, there's something in me that could dare to love this world again! . . . . Is the knowing all? To know, and even happily that we meet unblessed; not in some garden of wax fruit and painted trees, that lie of Eden, but after, after the Fall, after many, many deaths. And the wish to kill is never killed, but with some gift of courage one may look into its face when it appears, and with a stroke of love-- as to an idiot in the house--forgive it; again and again. . .for-ever?

( After the Fall, 128)





Adam's guilt, the heritage of this civilization, falls into a new perspective, and its object, pride, emerges as man's most precious creative trait. The complicity with evil that living necessarily entails must only be recognized in order for guilt to be borne (for it can never be eradicated). In After the Fall Miller sacrifices positive law to the individual solipsistic quest for identity--it is precisely the point Kreiger makes too. Natural law is at last vested in the individual: what is right for him is right, providing only that he has courage to face the possible consequences invoked by an uncomprehending society. Miller seems no longer to recognize an absolute natural law outside the individual, but to say this is not to say that he sanctions anarchy, moral or social. Rather, I think, he is at the point Royce reached, where it becomes impossible to deny any conceivable action its right to exist simply because it contradicts the status quo. Dostoevsky's fear that "if God does not exist, everything is permitted" has become a fact of this generation: everything is permitted, or very nearly. But as the responsibility for it now rests on each individual rather than on an omnipotent deity, sooner or later such responsibility will produce more conscious, more committed individuals.



Much has been said to the effect that After the Fall is a dramatization of Miller's own psychological agonies. I do not doubt that in large part, it is (the facts are too obvious to be coincidental), but I agree with him that this is far from the main issue. As drama, Fall is unusual but powerful. As an argument which sustains a delicate balance of emotion and intellect it is timely and important. As far as I know, Miller is the only contemporary dramatist who concerns himself with the existential problems modern man encounters as if they might be overcome, and his dedication to them is total. Writing on Fall, he observes that for most men

to perceive somehow our own complicity with evil is a horror not to be borne. . . . But what is the most innocent place in any country? Is it not the insane asylum? . . . The perfection of innocence, indeed, is madness. . . .

It is, therefore, not that the play is personal which offends some people; it is, in my opinion, that the pain it delivers up is nonliterary; it is too actual; it is not sentimentalized enough.<sup>11</sup>

This is, I think, a fair assessment of the play's impact. To comment further on it is impossible without involving theories of the nature and aims of literature. One thing, however, is quite clear: Miller's idea of the function of drama is far from the cathartic ideal of Aristotle.





In Incident at Vichy he continues to explore guilt, responsibility, and the psychological adjustments men make to their environment. Sheila Huftel recalls hearing the following wry description of the play near New York's Washington Square, where it was first performed: "'Well, they just sit there, and the audience just thinks.'" <sup>12</sup>

Not only the audience thinks; much of the cerebrating is done before the footlights. As I have already noted, the characters in this play rely on their illusions to retain their sanity in the face of Nazi tyranny. Miller deals with their psychological reconstructing in an almost clinical fashion: Leduc, the psychologist, has no sentimental ideals, nothing but a powerful desire to live. He takes a professional interest in the ideals or poses with which the other men justify their lives, and sometimes takes a cruel delight in undermining their convictions. He has the unbounded intellectual pride that tripped Proctor and Quentin, and has something more too. I sense Miller's antipathy to psychologists who try "not to help a man to be more himself, but to control him" <sup>13</sup> and who insist on regarding human beings as merely one more species to observe. Leduc draws less sympathy than most of the other characters do at first; only after his final confrontation with Von Berg does he, too, seem completely human.



Marchand, the businessman, is the least appealing of the ten waiting prisoners. He displays a confidence possible only to one who knows himself to be invulnerable. He is detached, impatient, barely civil during his brief appearance; there is about him a calculating, mechanical quality which suggests that a basic heartlessness will ensure his safety. Lebeau is quite the opposite. He was caught because his soul rebelled against the necessity of constant vigilance. He says

I knew I shouldn't go outside. But you get tired of believing in the truth. You get tired of seeing things clearly.

(Incident at Vichy, 67)

He is a man of chronically undisciplined emotions; he finds what strength he can in the irrational hopes the prisoners exchange. Bayard represents yet another way of dealing with reality: the way of the committed socialist. He admits that it helps him to think of himself as a symbol:

It helps me because it's the truth. What am I to them personally? Do they know me? You react personally to this, they'll turn you into an idiot. You can't make sense of this on a personal basis.

(Incident at Vichy, 45)

And always, the need to "make sense" of it is paramount. But for some it is impossible to do so. The waiter, the boy, the old Jew, and the gypsy are each too little in control of themselves to offer





a calculated or convinced front to their captors. They will never make sense of their predicament, but that does nothing to lessen its horror for them. Each of them has, too, a unique dignity; the waiter has his professional affiliation with the Major, the boy has a family for whom he is responsible and to whom he is loyal in spite of his terror, the Jew has his sack of feathers, resolutely treasured for whatever obscure reason, and the gypsy has his iron pot and his declaration that it is not stolen. In moments of terror men cling to strange things to reassure themselves of their identity.

Monceau's defense against his interlocutors is a cavalier attitude of deliberate deception. "One must create one's own reality in the world," he maintains, and, later, when Leduc urges him to escape, "I refuse to play a part I do not fit." If this results in his death, he faces it with the knowledge that, in his own eyes, he has done his best. It is the attitude of the man who denies life, who refuses to accept his total responsibility for himself. This passage indicates how completely Monceau submerges himself in his society:

I go on the assumption that if I obey the law with dignity I will live in peace. I may not like the law, but evidently the majority does, or they would overthrow it. And I'm speaking now of the French majority, who outnumber the Germans in this town fifty to one.



These are French police, don't forget, not German. And if by some miracle you did knock out that guard you would find yourself in a city where not one person in a thousand would help you. And it's got nothing to do with being Jewish or not Jewish. It is what the world is, so why don't you stop insulting others with romantic challenges! (Incident at Vichy, 68)

In face of this attitude of total indifference (Monceau's mask for his fear), Leduc tells him "Your heart is conquered territory, mister." Monceau has denied his responsibility for the positive laws that govern his society, and in doing so, has dehumanized himself.

The Major who takes part in the investigation of the prisoners is in a certain sense a prisoner too: his lines make it clear that he has no heart for what he does, but it is a question of obeying the law or getting himself killed. Forced into this inhuman position, he takes refuge in the conviction that there is no longer any dignity, any honour, or any goodness that can survive in the world:

There are no persons any more, don't you see that? There will never be persons again. What do I care if you love me? Are you out of your mind? What am I, a dog that I must be loved?  
(Incident at Vichy, 71)

The mask is "duty;" behind it lie terror and despair.

Von Berg has no mask as such, but has in its place a deep sense of the honour of the aristocracy. He does not consciously use his ideal





to make truth bearable; he naturally assumes that it is the truth. He is obviously moved and intellectually stimulated by Leduc's conversation. Von Berg's ideal that history rests in the hands of a few people, whether aristocratic or plebian, and that these few are honourable, is confronted with Leduc's professional assessment:

I am only angry that I should have been born before the day when man has accepted his own nature; that he is not reasonable, that he is full of murder, that his ideals are only the little tax he pays for the right to hate and kill with a clear conscience. I am only angry that, knowing this, I still deluded myself. That there was not time to truly make part of myself what I know, and to teach others the truth. (Incident at Vichy, 84)

Von Berg answers angrily:

There are ideals, Doctor, of another kind. There are people who would find it easier to die than stain one finger with this murder. They exist. I swear it to you. People for whom everything is not permitted, foolish people and ineffectual, but they do exist and will not dishonour their tradition. Desperately: I ask your friendship. (Incident at Vichy, 84)

This exchange is prophetic of the play's conclusion. Immediately after it, in response to Von Berg's plea for friendship, Leduc observes that he has never known a gentile who did not hate Jews.

Von Berg denies it, horrified. Leduc replies,

Until you know it is true of you you will destroy whatever truth can come of this atrocity. . . . Each man has his Jew; it is the other. And the Jews have their Jews. And now, now above all,



you must see that you have yours--the man whose death leaves you relieved that you are not him, despite your decency. And that is why there is nothing and will be nothing--until you face your own complicity with this. . .your own humanity.

(Incident at Vichy, 85)

Again, Von Berg denies the charge. Leduc points out to him that an aristocratic relative of Von Berg's, a Baron Kessler, is implicated in the Nazi scourges. Von Berg was aware of this, and did nothing. Leduc says,

It's not your guilt I want, it's your responsibility--that might have helped. Yes, if you had understood that Baron Kessler was in part, in some small and frightful part--doing your will. You might have done something then, with your standing, and your name and your decency, aside from shooting yourself!

(Incident at Vichy, 86)

Von Berg's reaction to this is a cry similar in its Angst to Proctor's "who will judge me?": "What can ever save us?"

With the question comes its answer; Von Berg affirms and accepts his own responsibility by handing his pass to Leduc. The gesture proves his argument that "There are people who would find it easier to die than to stain one finger with this murder"; it also refutes Leduc's pessimistic analysis of mankind.

The guilt of hubris--the guilt that crippled Proctor and Quentin--now seizes Leduc. In effect he has wrested Von Berg's life from him by forcing him to the point of perception beyond which he cannot live





with dignity. Leduc's awareness of his own guilt almost prevents him from accepting the gift of life. When he does, it is with a recognition of the justice of the psychological laws that drive both him and Von Berg. His intellectual honesty and Von Berg's tremendous compassion lead each other to the point where feeling and intellect together indicate the only possible, viable action. Von Berg learns to accept his responsibility for the world's evil, and Leduc learns that there are men who will do so. The play is a triumph for both.

It seems apparent from the evidence of Miller's plays that subjective reconstruction of a situation can rarely withstand the onslaught of reality. Joe Keller brings about his own discovery; John Proctor and Quentin finally locate their responsibility short of the total responsibility they sought to assume; one is conscious that even Bert, in A Memory of Two Mondays, will find reality less than he expects. Willy Loman's dream does endure, but kills him. Eddie Carbone's obsession sustains him until his dying moments, when he asks the fateful "why?". Von Berg, like Willy and Eddie, lives out the consequences of his chosen ideal, but unlike them, he both recognizes it as a subjective reconstruction of reality and recognizes that in his own name he must be true to it.



The only natural law that survives Miller's relentless probing is the law of self-honesty, and it involves three responsibilities: first, to know the true situation of man and his world, as far as an individual can; secondly, to know one's own particular reconstruction of that situation, and to know it as a reconstruction (for only by such arbitrary structuring is social life made viable); and thirdly, to have the courage to live out the consequences of one's chosen position. Miller's final stance is a moral one, but it has passed through tragic vision to an intense and individual acceptance of responsibility for the universal in the name of the individual. To the writer who observed that "meaning is the ultimate reward for having lived,"<sup>14</sup> no other position could be tenable.





## CHAPTER IV

### AESTHETICS: LAW AND THE ARTIST

The creation of an illusory world or a persona for oneself is as much a work of art as is the creation of a play. As I have illustrated in the previous two chapters, Miller's drama concerns itself with the viability of the illusions which all men cherish: life is art and art is life; the artist is unlike other men only in the precision of his perceptive and imaginative powers.

But Miller's perceptive and imaginative powers are unusually precise and disciplined for this chaotic age. The same ideas that inform his dramatic themes also inform (i.e., give shape to) his technical presentation of them; the structure and rhetoric of each play derive directly from its thematic interests, and the result is an almost unfailing dramatic integrity. My approach here will permit me only a brief comment on the relationship between form and content in each play.



All My Sons grew out of Miller's earliest philosophical position--that there is an absolute and discoverable order and law in life--and it is consequently a frankly moral, legislative play. Its form reflects its preoccupation with positive law; it is realistic and straightforward. Materialism and guilt are represented in Joe Keller, idealism and comparative innocence in his son, Chris. The repeated clashes of these precipitate the play's climax. Each incident in the play is chosen for its suitability to the trivial nature of the world being dramatized, and in each the tension between the levelling social force of that world and the disturbing individual force of the will that opposes it may be clearly distinguished.

Rhetoric in All My Sons is the uninspired language of everyday; it catches the vagueness and frivolity of much daily speech. Yet because of the mounting tension and the inadvertent or guarded hints that prompt awareness, this laconic speech is freighted with real intensity. Characters define themselves by their mode of speech as well as by their words. Thus Joe's grammar is as halting as his thought, and he is conscious of the deficiency; it undermines his confidence. His wife's lines indicate her high-strung nature: she speaks in apocalypses. Chris seems to be an unwilling messenger from the gods, with the right insights on





the tip of his tongue but without the impartiality to utter them. He speaks little, but one can feel the emotion behind his responses. Jim Bayliss contributes one of the play's few passages of true lyricism in his observations on "The star of one's honesty." Bayliss' gift, like the gifts, humanity, and integrity of so many in this play, has been sacrificed to a materialistic ideal, and only a verbal melancholy remains to recall it.

It would seem from All My Sons that the drama of contemporary man is a drama of reaction rather than thought, and that the concept of a rationally-ordered life is alien. Chris, the play's rationalist, is guilt-ridden, often inarticulate, and very much out-of-the-ordinary. I have commented in Chapter II on his apparent awkwardness, and since my principle interest in this chapter is Miller as creator, perhaps this is the place to try to account for that awkwardness. First I should observe that, consciously or unconsciously, an author contains all his characters. It seems to follow that if he creates a notably conscious character amid a number of unaware ones, his intellect (which is not necessarily the same as his sympathy) is closest to the conscious character, if only because both share a great awareness of the drama's nature. Secondly, I have already pointed out that the early Miller is quite clearly



a moralist. These two points together suggest, I think, that Miller is trying to articulate his rational, moral viewpoint through Chris, and has (again, consciously or unconsciously) set Joe and the other characters up in opposition to it as if in acknowledgement of the limitations implicit in his vision and in an effort to test the vision. Chris is hesitant with his opinions; he knows they contain a truth, but he seems anxious to understand completely the viewpoints outside them before asserting them. He is reluctant to assume the role and the responsibility of judge. Thus through this play's organic structure, which rises out of its thematic tensions, Miller succeeds both in making a point--Chris' point about the necessity of relatedness and responsibility--and evoking a humane awareness of why men fail to achieve relatedness and responsibility. I think Chris' guilt for his consciousness is a direct reflection of Miller's own, for each points to a truth knowing that truth can destroy.

Perhaps this helps to explain why in his second play Miller dramatizes a non-rational consciousness and lets it triumph. Truth, fact, and positive law all destroy Willy Loman, but none of these can substantially impair his image of himself. The play is structured on this image. Consequently it is a dreamlike





drama: time is exploded, incidents merge as they do in the excited mind; a mended stocking or an encroaching skyscraper slips into focus equally well through Willy's cinematic consciousness, and each precipitates a series of ancillary images. The play has no rational axis; Charley and Biff, the only two characters who could supply such an axis, are each too insignificant and inarticulate to do so. Instead, the axis is emotional and psychological: Willy's urgent need for his dignity, Linda's compassionate understanding, Happy's uncomprehending mimicry, even Charley's and Biff's helplessness demonstrate Miller's conviction that man can transcend every empirical definition-- "we are made, and yet are more than what made us."<sup>1</sup> The play's causal development is antithetical to All My Sons; where Sons unfolds in a clear cause-and-effect pattern, Salesman spins toward its climax in an ever-expanding gyre. What was clearly forecast comes to pass in Sons; one expects it as one expects justice. Willy's death is forecast too, but its effect is totally different: not justice, but catastrophe and triumph, demanding a full emotional response.

The rhetoric of Death of a Salesman is often hollow. It emphasizes the dichotomy between dream and reality, and the



tragedy of the former and the shoddiness of the latter. Biff and Charley, the rationalists, are effectively silenced; the entire play is a lyrical statement and only Willy's misguided poetry can merge with its main thrust. Truth does eventually destroy Willy, but he dies believing in his own image of himself--dies as a Christ-like gesture--he never discovers within himself a monstrous failure who must be murdered. Joe Keller does, and the discovery impairs the triumph of his tragedy because it limits him to death or dishonour. Willy never accepts his empirical failure as Joe does, and so his suicide is more truly a gift. There is a great deal of Miller's humanity in him, but less than Miller's full intellectual consciousness, and this is so, I think, because Miller doubted the validity of his own moral messianism. Salesman has roots in an arbitrarily moral world, but its every line questions that world's authority.

In The Crucible, again a rational and conscious character is forced to assert himself over an irrational situation, and hesitates. Like All My Sons, this is a moral, legalistic play--a dialectic between Proctor and his accusers. But in this play the author's moral sanction is clearly with the accused: it seems that in order to justify the individual's defiance of his society on rational grounds,





Miller had to create an insane society. And in spite of his consciousness of what madness has been wrought by ignorance and innocence, Proctor shrinks from his own isolation, turns back longingly to the greater "goodness" (in fact a greater innocence and so a lesser consciousness) of Giles Corey and Rebecca Nurse. The Crucible is structured on this tension between social and psychological law, general and individual guilt and responsibility. Its resolution finally suggests an acceptance on Miller's part of the conscious man's right to oppose his society. But he has not yet come to terms with the tragic vision that such opposition demands; beyond opposition, he can posit only a dignified, tragic death.

Rhetoric in The Crucible reflects both the nature of the world being dramatized and the intensity of the tensions that exist in it. On one level the dialogue is stark, factual, as staccato as a judicial inquiry; this level reflects the ironbound morality of the period. A startlingly powerful poetry rises up unexpectedly to counteract this flatness, and the contrast makes for a rhetoric that is as crisp and penetrating as an icy blast. The poetry has, I think, two origins: it is influenced naturally by the New England Puritans' exclusive Biblical absorption, and it emerges also as an unconscious re-



action against their disciplined lives. Its qualities are simplicity, vibrant religious and natural imagery, syntactical inversions, and rhetorical interrogation.

Partly by his silences, partly by his daring statements, Proctor early establishes himself as a man whose word is authoritative, honest, and entirely his own. Parris' eloquence is more obviously a pulpit heritage; Danforth's is a judicial heritage. Hale is a victim of the scholar's blindness and the scholar's pride, and his self-expression grows in integrity as his self-awareness grows. Abigail's terrifying speech is, with few exceptions, insincere, but its emotional intensity earns it the power of truth. The difficulty the play presents to its audience is that of determining which of these many passionately-asserted viewpoints is valid (for all are compelling) and of subsequently establishing why it is valid, and why and how it should come to prevail. Thus, through this play's structure and rhetoric, Miller leads his audience directly to the heart of his moral problem: what must happen to the rational individual who dares to defy his society? Because Proctor dies, this dilemma is not really resolved in The Crucible, but it is more forcefully articulated than in either of the preceding plays.





A View from the Bridge evades the implications of this dilemma for the rationalist--the tragic--visionary implications--much as Death of a Salesman evades rationalism. Bridge is about an emotional and irrational man; it is consequently conceived as a sequence of staccato incidents each jarring against the next. One feels individual emotion jabbing social convention here, and feels the futility of it too. Rhetoric in this play is limited by the nature of the characters; more is implied by gesture and silence (Marco's threatening gesture with the chair at the end of the first scene; Eddie's spasmodic sullenness) than by assertion. Alfieri further distances the play from the audience by recalling its archetypal theme and by emphasizing the inevitability of the social code's victory over Eddie's rebellion. In Chapter III I have already commented on the ambiguity of the play's two endings; this, the play's position in Miller's canon, and the fact that in it he seems to be reaching out to an established form (classical tragedy) to find an order for his contemporary vision, suggest that his moral position regarding the individual and society is no less agonized than in The Crucible.

He reaches toward one other form before finally articulating his moral vision--to the mood play, in A Memory of Two Mondays. Like A View from the Bridge, this play's form and rhetoric are



limited by its characters. Because these are undirected, minimally conscious, and move in a deterministic universe, the play's form is amorphous. Its two parts flow into each other as time does in memory, and the characters flow around the stage in patternless motion. Dialogue is laconic; Kenneth's poetry is deliberately shallow and resounds hollowly against the general gossip. Bert's silences (he says almost nothing) suggest more suspended animation and potential than does anything else in the play. Miller has said this play was written with great love,<sup>2</sup> and it may well have been. But it represents at best a digression of his talent and a perhaps therapeutic pause in his vision.

The vision I have been tracing--Miller's developing awareness and dramatization of tragic vision--flowered at last nine years after the publication of A Memory of Two Mondays.<sup>3</sup> Its expression is that rambling, troubling tempest, After the Fall. Miller's first successful play, All My Sons, tacitly celebrates the conscious, rational moralist. Death of a Salesman celebrates the reverse side of this coin. In The Crucible Miller is again drawn to the conscious rationalist, who exists this time to one side of conventional morality. A View from the Bridge shies from rationalism, as does A Memory of Two Mondays. And now, in After the Fall, the





conscious rationalist again emerges to assert his right to exist, and to prevail with dignity outside conventional morality.

The play represents the triumph of Miller's visionary quest. The evidence of the previous plays testifies to the rigor of the quest, and the form of After the Fall expresses that rigor. It is conceived as a mental inquest, and its structure reflects the serosity of the reflective process. The set is simply a fluid arrangement of slopes, curves, and plateaus; there are almost no props. All the characters and events co-exist simultaneously on the set; when Quentin's mind focuses on one, it is illuminated and so brought to the audience's attention. The play's dialogue is fragmented, and as elusive as the appearing and disappearing characters. One incident or individual suggests another, and another, so that several disparate scraps of memory appear juxtaposed, and this juxtaposition often prompts an insight into Quentin's troubles. For example, he juxtaposes his Mother's adoration of him with Eloise's, with Maggie's, and with Holga's, and each one illuminates the nature and motivations of the others.

After the Fall's rhetoric, like its form, derives from its content. It is variously strident, lyrical, and peaceful; as in the mind that questions itself relentlessly, a series of intense incidents force



a mental crisis and a kind of quiet emerges. The rhetoric is truly poetic, for it seems to grow out of itself, mounting in intensity as Quentin's self-awareness grows and moving from tortuous dialectic to lyrical statement, from search to epiphany. Miller at last reaches and embraces tragic vision in this play, and consequently his hero, Quentin, is able to justify himself and to endure. Again, content dictates form.

Incident at Vichy expands the vision articulated in After the Fall. It is structured on a life-and-death dialectic, and its set is simple, designed to emphasize the nakedness of the issue at stake. That issue is, what is the nature of humanity? No word or gesture is wasted in this play; each contributes an insight into one aspect of the human condition and all together, juxtaposed, suggest the infinite variety of means by which men attempt to justify their lives. All the characters speak in formulae suited to the personae they have adopted; at the dramatic peaks of the play these formulae are breached and the real human response they hide bursts out. The play is involved thematically with exposing the illusions men cherish, and its jagged dialectical structure emerges directly from this theme. The final scene between Von Berg and the Captain is acted in silence because no rhetoric can encompass its passions: form and content





have merged completely.

Throughout Miller's drama one is conscious of his concern with artifice, not only in the sculpted finesse of his dramatic technique but in his persistent clinging to a formal structure--however absurd--to order the incidents of life. In this involvement with order, form, and meaning he is emphatically outside the mainstream of contemporary theatre. Edward Albee, William Inge, and Tennessee Williams in America document the disintegration of human characters; Pinter and Osborne in England tend to do the same, the former emphasizing the darkly comic aspects of his theme. Genet, Beckett, and Ionesco create turgid, troubling wasteland plays or wild parodies of modern man's search for identity. The remarkable thing about Miller is that he should be able to stand outside the existential despair of these dramatists and still survive as spokesman for his age.

I have said in Chapter I that the question of ultimate absurdity rarely arises in Miller. It is, on the other hand, the axis around which contemporary European dramas pivot, with more or less haphazardness depending on the degree of chaos their authors see in the world. Miller's bywords, organic unity, relatedness, responsibility, identity, courage, and meaning are in opposition to



every tenet of this drama of flux and mesmerism. His ideal, the conscious, responsible, articulate hero who dares hope to elicit some order from his life and makes a practical effort to do so, stands in sharp contrast to Ionesco's and Osborne's crippled, caricature-like figures. Similarly his rhetoric, with its moments of driving passion and sheer lyricism, evokes by its very presence a consciousness of at least one of the delights of life--poetry. The frenetic garbling of Ionesco's plays or the four-letter-fanaticism of Albee's do--and I understate wildly--not.

One can understand the despair that has bred the contemporary drama of futility. To the conscious and sensitive observer ours is a world where the dice are loaded against the individual; man has turned himself into a cypher and now looks on in horror and anguish as the cypher divides him. Albee makes a plea for interpretation that reveals beneath his scabrous crust a concerned and questing human:

Are creative writers making society rather than man himself their subject, leaning too heavily on the social sciences and psychology? Can we make use of facts--the ingredients of truth--without becoming their servants? Will Marshall McLuhan explain the new "theory of communication" and "the writer in the electronic age" so that I (at least) will finally be able to sense the subject through all the electrical discharge?<sup>4</sup>





When even a society's writers doubt or abnegate their ability and responsibility to articulate life, what hope is there for the survival of the society as a human institution? It is interesting to note that Miller, who insists on a basis of fact (positive law) in his drama, succeeds in exploring and affirming "man himself" without becoming a victim of facts. Saul Bellow, who is temperamentally very much like Miller, has repudiated meaninglessness in literature, and, as Miller dramatized his own existential problem in After the Fall, Bellow dramatized (and thus exorcised) his in Herzog.

He says of it,

In writing Herzog I felt that I was completing a certain development, coming to the end of a literary sensibility. This sensibility implies a certain attitude towards civilization--anomaly, estrangement, the outsider, the collapse of humanism. What I'm against is a novel of purely literary derivation--accepting the canon of Joyce and Kafka. With Dostoevsky, at least, his eyes are turned freshly to the human scene. This view of life as literature is the modern disease--a French infection. Inevitably, it puts all hope into performance, into virtuosity.<sup>5</sup>

Bellow, like Miller and in contrast to most contemporary dramatists and novelists, is a moralist. He has defined the moral nature of the writer this way:

In what form shall life be justified? That is the essence of the moral question. We call a writer moral to the degree that his imagination indicates to us how we may answer naturally, without strained arguments, with a spontaneous, mysterious proof that has no need to argue with despair.<sup>6</sup>



Miller's last two plays argue, ever so slightly, with despair. To me this merely indicates that he is aware of the problem of despair as one of the philosophical anxieties of modern man. The main thrust of his drama is still consistently toward life, toward joy, (tragedy, as he has pointed out, being essentially optimistic) and toward hope. The paradox of the drama of futility is patent in its existence; Eric Bentley is quoted in Time as saying "If one had truly lost hope, one would not be on hand to say so."<sup>7</sup> And so it seems that the shriek of the absurd in literature is ultimately a hollow one, and the whole philosophical posture it implies is merely a step on the road to maturity.

Why is it that Miller has escaped the debilitating effects of this posture? Part of the answer must, I think, be sought in his background. He writes from a Jewish heritage, and the philosophical drift of Judaism is toward affirmation of life, here and now. It seems fair to suggest that Miller's human-centered drama derives in part, at least, from his human-centered religious heritage. Other facets of his background contribute similarly to his tendency to bypass despair. He grew up during the Depression, and so learned early the necessity of individual effort and the necessity of control and order in society. Throughout his life he has remained





in contact with the daily realities of the ordinary workman's life; for a time he formed the habit of spending a few weeks each year at some technical job just in order to re-alert his consciousness to the condition and mood of men outside the literary-dramatic circle. He is a pragmatist who cherishes the concrete over the abstract and who realises, in spite of the irresponsible escapism of his age, that the instinct for survival is still the basic human drive. One critic has observed that "Compassion is Miller's remedy, commonsense his curb";<sup>8</sup> the formula is rather too glib, but it is certainly applicable.

Miller has, however, the weakness of his strength. His concept of art as a symbolic unifier is admirable; his conviction that meaning is life's only justification is probably true. But together these enclose him in an essentially moral pattern that excludes him from dramatizing the anarchy, disintegration, and solipsistic terror that are intrinsic in twentieth-century life. He cannot convey the anguish of flux; he formulates it into design. I mention this merely to point out that whether the contemporary writer adopts an amoral stance and catalogues flux or whether he adopts a moral stance and orders flux, he must choose. He cannot encompass both; the best he can hope for is to grow through one to the other. Miller's growth



takes him from a narrowly legalistic moral vision conceived in specific social terms, through an intense and anarchic tragic vision conceived as the zenith of individual consciousness, and on to an essentially aesthetic faith in man's will to order his universe even in the face of the absurd.

Chaos is the law of nature;  
Order is the dream of man.

--Henry Adams





## FOOTNOTES

### Chapter I

<sup>1</sup> I use the term in the sense in which Miller uses it in his essay, "Tragedy and the Common Man," the New York Times (27 February 1949), Section II, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Camus, Myth of Sisyphus, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>4</sup> Miller, Collected Plays, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>6</sup> Miller, "The Shadows of the Gods," Harper's CCXVII (August 1958), 37.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Miller and Brandon, "The State of the Theatre," Harper's, CCXXI (November 1960), 65.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>10</sup> Miller, "On Social Plays," A View From the Bridge, 15

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>16</sup> Miller and Brandon, "The State of the Theatre," Harper's, CCXXI (November 1960), 66.



<sup>17</sup> Miller, "Our Guilt for the World's Evil," New York Times Magazine (3 January 1965), 11.

<sup>18</sup> Miller, "The Writer as Independent Spirit," Saturday Review, XLIX (4 June 1966), 16.

<sup>19</sup> Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," the New York Times (27 February 1949), Section II, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>25</sup> Miller, "On Social Plays," A View From the Bridge, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Miller and Brandon, "The State of the Theatre," Harper's, CCXXI (November 1960), 68.

<sup>27</sup> Miller, "Our Guilt for the World's Evil," New York Times Magazine (3 January 1965), 11.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>30</sup> Miller, Collected Plays, 55.

<sup>31</sup> Miller, "The Writer as Independent Spirit," Saturday Review, XLIX, (4 June 1966), 17.

## Chapter II

<sup>1</sup> Miller, Collected Plays, 24-5.





<sup>2</sup> Miller, "The Family in Modern Drama," Modern Drama, 223.

<sup>3</sup> Miller, Collected Plays, 30-1.

<sup>4</sup> Eliot, Four Quartets, 14.

<sup>5</sup> This play stretches toward the recognition that no temporal law can ever fully accommodate these exigencies, but the recognition is never made explicit.

<sup>6</sup> Huftel, The Burning Glass, 154-5.

<sup>7</sup> Miller, Collected Plays, 49.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Miller, "On Social Plays," A View From the Bridge, 15.

### Chapter III

<sup>1</sup> This calls to mind the Marquis de Sade's observation that murder is necessary to society. I think it is, and is, furthermore, inevitable. This does not, however, imply that retribution should be suspended. On the contrary: the social value of the crime derives from precisely the degree of involvement of society in the retribution. Ideally, the crime should reveal to each man his own murderous capacity, and test his ethics regarding it.

<sup>2</sup> Steinberg, "Arthur Miller and the Idea of Modern Tragedy," Thought, 1960, 127.

<sup>3</sup> Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," the New York Times (27 February 1949), Section II, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Kreiger, The Tragic Vision, 1-21, passim.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> Royce, The Encapsulated Man, 166.



- <sup>7</sup> Miller, Collected Plays, 11.
- <sup>8</sup> Miller, "The Shadows of the Gods," Harper's, CCXVII (August 1958), 37.
- <sup>9</sup> Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," the New York Times (27 February 1949), Section II, 1.
- <sup>10</sup> Bentley, The Dramatic Event, 92.
- <sup>11</sup> Miller, "With respect for her agony, but with love," Life, LVI (7 February 1964), 66.
- <sup>12</sup> Huftel, The Burning Glass, 229.
- <sup>13</sup> Miller, "The Writer as Independent Spirit," Saturday Review, XLIX (4 June 1966), 17.
- <sup>14</sup> Miller, "On Social Plays," A View From the Bridge, 15.

#### Chapter IV

- <sup>1</sup> Miller, Collected Plays, 55.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., 49.
- <sup>3</sup> In 1955. Fall was published in 1964.
- <sup>4</sup> Albee, "Creativity and Commitment," Saturday Review, XLIX (4 June 1966), 26.
- <sup>5</sup> Boroff, portrait of Bellow, Saturday Review, XLVII (19 September 1964), 38.
- <sup>6</sup> Bellow, "Writer as Moralist," Atlantic, CCXI (March 1963), 62.
- <sup>7</sup> Bentley, "The Modern Theatre or, The World as a Metaphor of Dread," Time, LXXXVIII (8 July 1966), 33.
- <sup>8</sup> West, "Arthur Miller and the Human Mice," Hibbert Journal, LXI (January 1963), 86.





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